

Fairfaktor

Cultural Sustainability

Brochure

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Glossary

Affected people: in the context of this brochure describes those who are directly affected by the consequences of systemic structures, policies, practices, or actions rooted in colonialism. In the context of cultural appropriation, this refers to individuals or communities who are impacted by the misuse or exploitation of their cultural heritage.

BIPoC: stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. This term is a self-designation developed as an act of empowerment and solidarity by and for people who are exposed to various forms of racism. It is used to emphasise the particular experiences of structural injustices that these groups face due to historically established societal power relations. While it serves to highlight this shared reality of life, the term is also sometimes criticised for the very fact that it categorises very heterogeneous groups in an undifferentiated way. It is therefore important to recognise that the original self-designation – even if it has entered common usage as a result of the growing awareness of structural racism – is not intended to assign individual identities to a heterogeneous group, but rather to highlight societal structures. Acknowledging the origin, significance and criticism of this term, we use it in this brochure to emphasise the effects of colonialism still prevalent today in the form of racism and systemic injustices.

Fair Trade: describes the concept of a trading partnership that strives for more justice in international trade based on dialogue, transparency, and respect. It aims to contribute to sustainable development by creating fairer trading conditions and securing social rights for marginalised producers and workers – especially in the Global South. The objective is to improve the living and working conditions of people at the beginning of global supply chains and to strengthen their political and economic position. There are different approaches and movements, however they agree in the mission to change the prevailing unjust trading conditions through an alternative system, education and advocacy work.

Fashion and textile industry: encompasses the production, distribution, and retail of clothing and textiles. This industry is known for its globalised supply chains and its significant economic, social, and environmental impacts.

Global North and Global South: are terms that group countries based on socio-economic and political factors. The terms are not to be understood in strictly geographical terms but rather attempt to offer a more value-free way of categorising countries in the global context. Global North describes countries with a strong economy, advanced

infrastructure and an overall high standard of living. This includes countries mainly in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, as well as parts of East Asia, that historically benefited from colonialism through the extraction of resources and wealth from colonised regions, leading to lasting economic and political dominance and trade advantages. Global South refers to countries mainly in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania that were historically colonised and exploited by colonial states. These countries often face ongoing socio-economic challenges and exploitation due to the negative consequences of colonialism including economic dependency, power imbalances and limited global political influence. While the terms are also criticised for being too vague or oversimplifying and covering up more complex issues, we make use of these terms in this context for the sake of a clearer understanding and a focus on the overall structures.

Marginalised: describes groups or individuals who are excluded from mainstream social, economic, cultural, or political life and thus pushed to the margins of society. This exclusion often results in limited access to resources, opportunities, and rights. Marginalisation takes place within a power structure and goes along with discrimination as it is often rooted in historical circumstances.

1. Introduction

This brochure is part of a comprehensive set of toolkits developed as part of the Fairfaktor research project, which aims to strengthen the crafted fair fashion sector. This is to be achieved by supporting artisans in exploiting market potentials and by promoting cooperation between Fair Trade producers or small artisan organisations in the Global South and social fashion businesses or designers in the Global North. In the context of intercultural cooperation, the topic of cultural sustainability and specifically cultural appropriation in design, is of particular importance. With this brochure we are addressing actors in the Global North with the intention to promote awareness and a sensitive mindset among readers.

The fashion and textile industry is a dynamic international market, which commonly seeks inspiration from various cultures around the globe. Intercultural exchange can lead to innovative ideas and designs. However, we must be aware that what is claimed as exchange or inspiration often rather is a form of so-called cultural appropriation. This describes the use of cultural heritage from another culture than the own, against the background of global, historically determined power asymmetries. We need to consider that the global system we live in, including political and economic structures, is based on these asymmetries rooting in colonialism. Global industries, including the fashion and textile industry, are based on this system that up to today is linked to exploitation and injustice.

While a lot of ethical fashion businesses are addressing issues revolving around social and ecological sustainability, the element of cultural sustainability does not receive the same attention, and cultural heritage in design is often dismissed. Fair Trade organisations and businesses working in intercultural contexts are not automatically immune to this. Cooperating with partners in the Global South and ensuring fair trading and working conditions is not always synonymous with a partnership on equal terms. This is due to the fact that systemic power asymmetries are not that easily resolved.

Therefore, in this brochure we are aspiring to create awareness among people in positions of power and those working in Fair Trade and social fashion businesses. This brochure introduces the topic of cultural sustainability. It illustrates the context and background knowledge necessary to understand why cultural appropriation is not just an unpleasant marketing problem to avoid, but actually a matter of sustainability. The brochure introduces culture as the fourth dimension of sustainability with a special focus on the fashion and textile industry. It intends to address a wide audience to create awareness and anchor the importance of this topic for companies with a holistic sustainable approach and beyond.

As the topic of cultural appropriation and cultural sustainability is very extensive, this brochure does not claim to be comprehensive and cannot cover all

positions on this topic. It aims to provide an overview to give an introduction to the topic. However, the brochure is also limited by the fact that it was written by a team of people from a Global North perspective. Nevertheless, we are addressing this topic, because a project about Fair Trade crafts is not complete without shedding a light on cultural sustainability. This brochure aims to share the perspective of affected cultures and marginalised communities, who have the authority to interpret this topic. It is based on the specialist knowledge and the extensive work of experts and organisations, all of which are credited in the list of references. It also presents potential approaches and solutions developed by the very same to continue with. In addition to this brochure, we recommend further reading on the topic, such as the resources mentioned above.

2. Culture and sustainable development

In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission, published the report 'Our Common Future', which for the first time introduced a definition of the concept of sustainable development as follows:



Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.¹

This definition of sustainable development was recognised as an international principle at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992.² This decision was based on the realisation that economic efficiency, social justice and the protection of natural resources are equally important dimensions for survival which complement each other.³

This understanding has subsequently become established and is often referred to as the three pillars or **three dimensions of sustainability**:

- economic performance
- ecological compatibility
- social justice⁴

In 1995, the German Commission on the Protection of People and the Environment resumed: Due to their complex interrelationships, the economic, ecological and social dimensions must be treated equally and in an integrative manner.⁵

In line with the definition of sustainable development, economic sustainability describes the maintenance of a viable economic system, taking into account the resources needed to uphold a certain level of welfare. Ecological sustainability focuses on the conscious and long-term protection of the environment and preservation of the planet, which includes the responsible management of natural resources and measures to curb global warming. Social sustainability accordingly refers to social justice and includes upholding human rights and ensuring equal opportunities for everyone, with a particular focus on marginalised groups.

¹UN Secretary General 1987

²BMZ 2024b

³BMZ 2024a

⁴BMUV 2021

⁵Deutscher Bundestag 1998

As there are only limited environmental resources, the planetary boundaries of the earth and life in dignity for all are essential guidelines for sustainable action. In concrete terms this means: We must not live at the expense of people in other regions of the world or at the expense of future generations.⁶ This implies that both intergenerational and intragenerational justice are essential aspects of sustainability, just as the three dimensions of sustainability. And while this understanding is still valid today, one could argue that it does not reflect all dimensions of our global societies and sustainable development.

Some voices suggest adding the dimension of culture, referring to the need for active protection and promotion of cultural heritage but also its potential to serve as a driver for other sustainability dimensions, including the creation of economic opportunities, the empowerment of local communities and the reduction of inequalities. Cultural practices and traditional knowledge also provide valuable insights for addressing ecological challenges, supporting sustainable livelihoods, and combating climate change. It is argued that incorporating culture into sustainability discussions in general can be crucial to shaping a just, inclusive and environmentally friendly future.⁷

Acknowledging this important role of culture and also the need to protect and preserve cultural heritage as part of sustainable development, results in the recognition of **culture as the fourth dimension of sustainability.**

Sass Brown and Federica Vacca state:

“Cultural sustainability is thus a response to a shift in our values that seeks to rectify the biases of the past by recognizing the importance of diversity, inclusion, representation and respect for other people, communities, and their representative material cultures, as well as the role that craftsmanship plays in expressing traditional culture.”⁸

⁶BMUV 2021

⁷Unesco 2023

⁸Brown&Vacca 2021

In line with the definition of sustainable development, cultural sustainability describes the preservation of cultural values and heritage taking into account inter- and intragenerational justice. Looking particularly at the fashion sector, “[it] refers to tolerant systems that recognise and cultivate diversity. This includes a diversity in the fashion and sustainability discourse to reflect a range of communities, locations and belief systems. It includes the

use of various strategies to preserve First Nations cultural heritage, beliefs, practices and histories. It seeks to safeguard the existence of these communities in ways that honour their integrity.”⁹

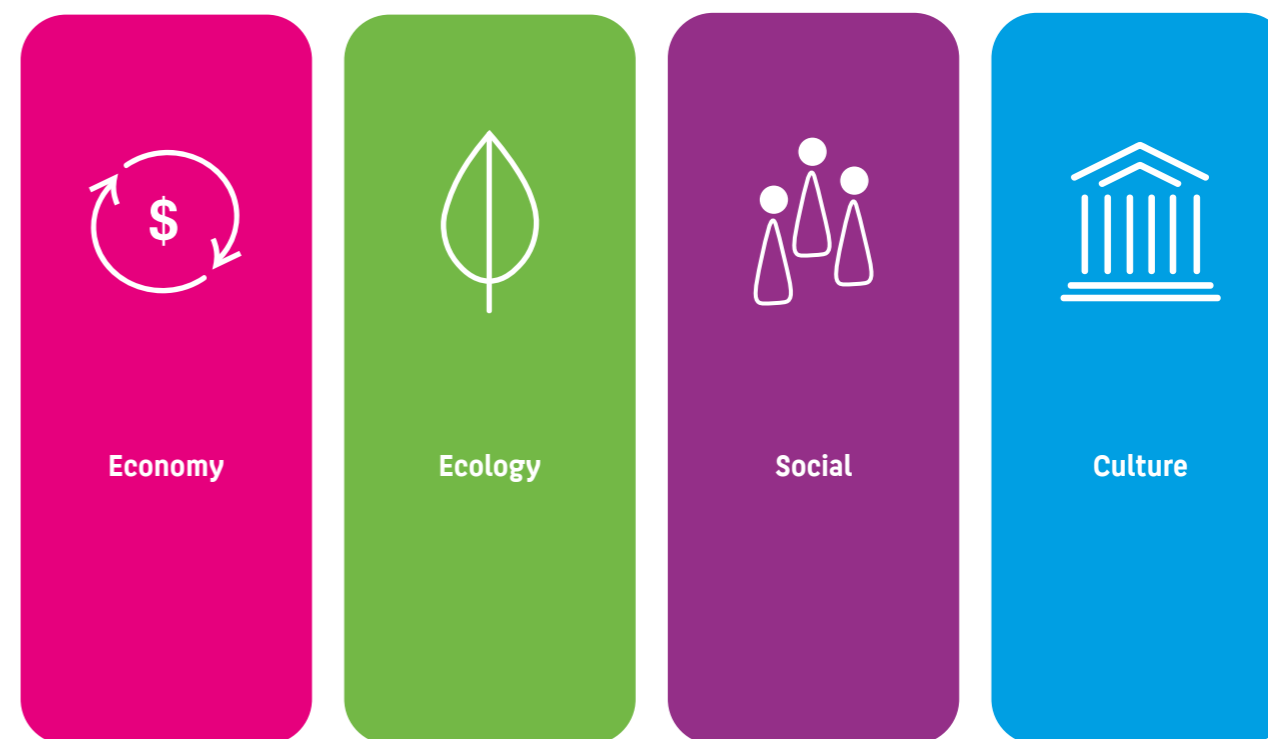


Figure 1: The four dimensions of sustainability. Own Figure based on Brown & Vacca.¹⁰

⁹Williams et al. 2019

¹⁰Brown&Vacca 2021

3. Colonial structures

3.1 Colonialism

As described above, sustainable development achieves inter- and intragenerational justice considering economic, ecologic, social and cultural dimensions. Looking at our current state of the world however, injustice prevails, considering that not everyone has the same access to means and the same possibility to fulfil their needs. This injustice is rooted in global power asymmetries as the historical consequence of colonialism. This chapter therefore attempts to demonstrate and elaborate on these interconnections.

Colonialism refers to the expansion of a society beyond its existing settlement area and the establishment of a relationship of domination over a population from a culture other than its own.¹¹

Next to missionary intentions and trade as essential drivers of colonialism, since the industrial revolution in particular, the primary aim has been economic exploitation.¹² The colonised society was deprived of fundamental opportunities

to lead a self-determined life, with colonisation and domination typically being justified by the coloniser's alleged cultural or developmental superiority and the idea of a civilising mission. This served to legitimise the control and rule of the colonial states over the colonised society. Another characteristic was the requirement that the colonised adapted almost completely to the cultural norms of the colonisers.¹³

In 1914, more than half of the world's population was under direct colonial rule through mostly European countries, like Great Britain, Spain, Germany, Belgium, and France, but also other countries such as the USA, Japan and Russia¹⁴, all of which belong to the most powerful states both on an economic and a political level nowadays.

¹¹Uni Oldenburg 2024

¹²bpb 2020

¹³Uni Oldenburg 2024

¹⁴bpb 2020

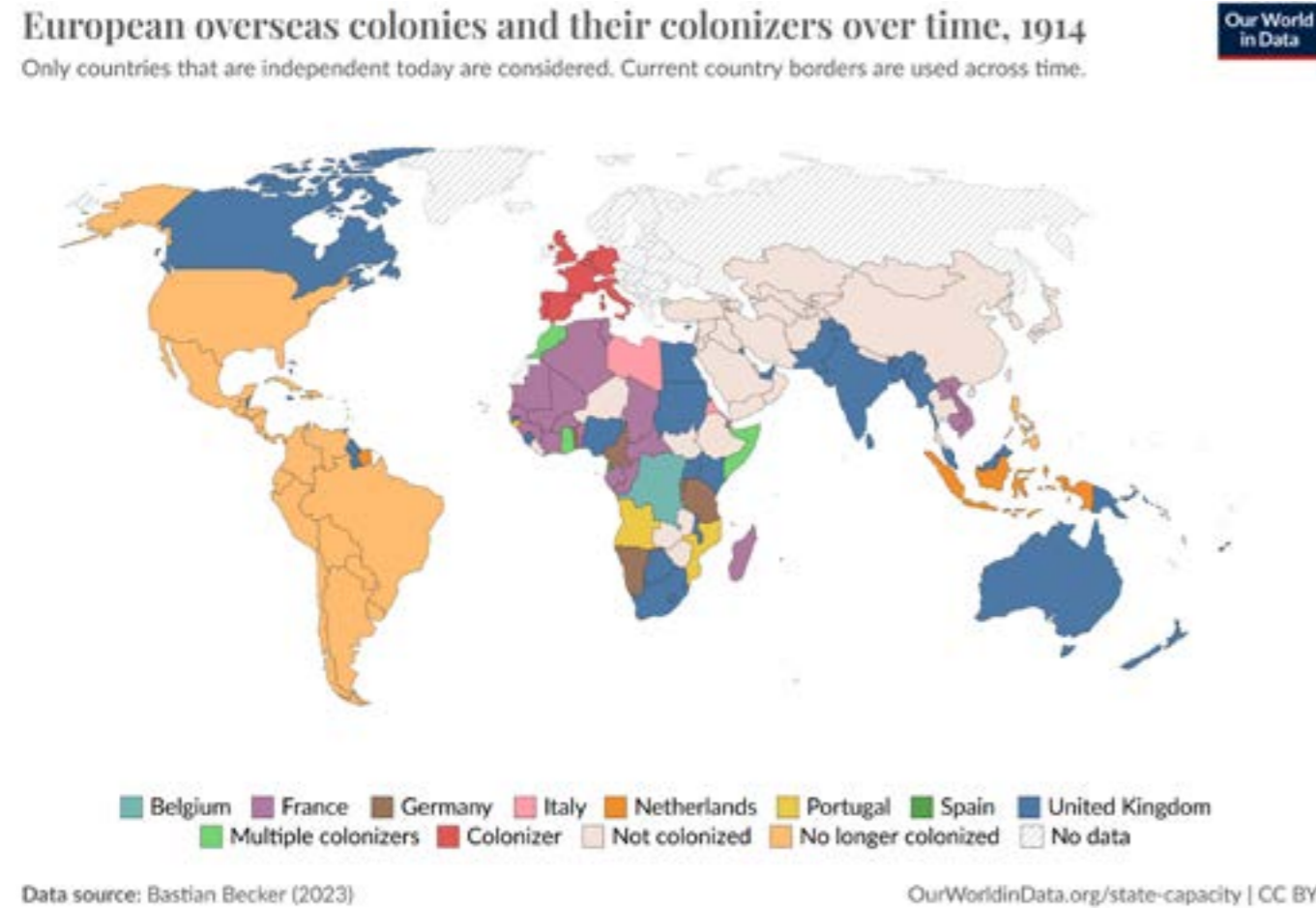


Figure 2: Division of the world around 1914¹⁵

¹⁵Becker 2023 as cited in Our World in Data 2024

3.2 Consequences and continuities

Although most of the formerly colonised states are now formally independent, economic and cultural dependence often remains to this day.¹⁶ These structural consequences that continue to exist are referred to as colonial continuities. It is not possible to describe all the consequences of colonialism in this brochure, especially because they have become so deeply entrenched in the structures of our global system. In terms of the global economy, the existence of colonial continuities and their impact on formerly colonised societies can be summarised as follows.

Colonialism allowed industrialised nations and companies to exploit labour and valuable natural resources, creating an unfair competitive advantage that persists today. This advantage is difficult to overcome, in part because there has been little recognition or compensation for the damages inflicted during colonial times. The global economic system and modern supply chains continue to operate on principles reminiscent of colonial practices, where local regions and their populations are exploited for the benefit and economic profit of dominant industrialised nations.

Moreover, the extraction of resources and raw materials including the associated negative consequences primarily occurs in the Global South, while the most significant value creation – through processing, manufacturing, and consumption – takes place in the Global North. This disparity makes it extremely challenging for formerly colonised countries to end this cycle of dependence.

Due to these structures of global value chains, the economies of these countries often centre around the export of raw materials, leaving them economically dependent on foreign markets that control the prices and terms of trade. This reinforces colonial power dynamics and the persistence of colonial continuities.¹⁷

¹⁶bpb 2020

¹⁷BMZ 2023 & Eine Welt Stadt Berlin 2022

3.3 Colonial continuities in the fashion industry

Since colonial continuities are intertwined with our global economy and supply chains, they also show in the fashion and textile industry. This industry in particular has a history of colonialism and slavery linked to cotton production.¹⁸ It also still shows colonial structures up to today, which manifest in exploitative practices on an economic, environmental, social and cultural level. Briefly illustrated in the following, this underlines the deep connection between colonial continuities and the lack of sustainable practices in global trade with a particular view on the impact within the fashion and textile industry.

economy: one-sided value creation

To this day, global supply chains are based on a colonial principle: While the damage for extensive agriculture and raw material extraction remains in the Global South, value creation and consumption takes place in the Global North.¹⁹ This also applies to the fashion industry, where the labour-intensive production steps and the associated negative impacts have been outsourced by many companies from the Global North.²⁰ This is underlined by the fact that the countries with the highest

import value for clothing worldwide are all located in the latter, including the USA and Germany.²¹ For example, in Europe, textile consumption had on average the fourth highest impact on the environment and climate change from a global life cycle perspective in 2020.²²

environment: resource depletion

The fashion industry has a significant negative impact on the environment and natural resources due to water, land and raw material use as well as greenhouse gas emissions, making it one of the most

¹⁸Universität Potsdam 2023

¹⁹Eine Welt Stadt Berlin 2022

²⁰CSR in Deutschland 2024

²¹WTO 2023

²²European Environment Agency 2024

environmentally damaging industries.²³

As mentioned before, the damage often occurs in countries in the Global South, as can be seen in cotton production, which requires immense amounts of water and chemicals. A concrete example of the associated consequences is the drying up of the Aral Lake, which was largely caused by the massive extraction of water for cotton production, while at the same time pesticides and fertilisers put a heavy strain on local ecosystems.²⁴

society: modern slavery

The fashion industry is one of the industries with a very high risk of modern slavery, forced labour and human exploitation. According to the Global Slavery Index, this risk exists “[...] at each stage of the garment supply chain, from growing and producing raw materials, to processing these into inputs, to manufacturing.”²⁵ Textiles rank fifth among the highest value at-risk products imported by the G20 nations.²⁶

culture: cultural appropriation

In the fashion industry, the exploitation of intangible cultural heritage of marginalised communities by large, (economically) powerful brands and companies from more dominant societies under the guise of inspiration is commonplace.²⁷ As cultural appropriation is the main topic of this brochure we will describe its mechanism in detail in the next chapter.

²³European Environment Agency 2024

²⁴EJF 2024

²⁵Global Slavery Index 2023a

²⁶Global Slavery Index 2023b

²⁷Mode macht Menschen 2024

4. Cultural heritage and appropriation

4.1 Cultural heritage

As explained before, cultural appropriation is a form of exploitation that is rooted in colonialism. It describes “the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture.”²⁸ In order to comprehend how the appropriation of culture takes place, we must first look at how culture itself is defined.

In the final report of the Second World Conference on Cultural Policies organised by UNESCO in 1982, the following definition has been introduced: “[In] its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, tradition and beliefs [...]”²⁹

Cultural heritage thus comprises the “features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, that were created in the past and still have historical importance.”³⁰ While this includes tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage, in this brochure we will focus on the latter, which is described in more detail below.

²⁸Cambridge Dictionary 2014

²⁹UNESCO 1982

³⁰Cambridge Dictionary 2024

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted in 2003, defines this as

“the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.³¹

According to this definition, intangible cultural heritage includes, among other things, social practices and traditional craftsmanship, which are of particular importance in the context of the fashion industry and design.

The Convention has been adopted with the aim to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of the relevant communities and ensure respect for it, both by raising awareness of its importance and promoting appreciation for it, as well as through international assistance. Consequently, cultural appropriation, characterised by its lack of understanding and respect, should be prevented as it contributes to the dilution of the original cultural heritage with its meaning and values.

³¹UNESCO 2003

4.2 Cultural appropriation

Cultural appropriation is a term that primarily describes the adoption of creative themes or practices by one cultural group from another, yet is also connoted with dominance and exploitation.³² Even though cultures are not multi-layered and dynamic, and mutual influence and exchange occurs, wherever cultures meet, this takes place in different forms and against different backgrounds.³³ While there are many debates about whether this exchange or influence of cultures can be a natural or even positive phenomenon in a globalised world, this brochure aims to take a structural perspective. The intended statement is that in a system in which certain states, groups and people still benefit from colonial structures and continue to exercise their dominance in order to exploit others, often no equal exchange between certain cultures (with a persistent asymmetry of power) can take place.

In his 2006 article ‘From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation’ Richard A. Rogers categorises cultural appropriation into four forms:

1. **Cultural exchange:** the reciprocal exchange of cultural elements between cultures on (approximately) equal power levels.
2. **Cultural dominance:** the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in the context of the imposition of this dominant culture on the latter
3. **Cultural exploitation:** the appropriation of cultural elements by a dominant culture without substantive reciprocity, permission or compensation of the original, subordinate culture
4. **Transculturation:** the creation of cultural elements from and by multiple cultures in a way that makes it difficult to identify a single culture of origin.³⁴

³²Oxford Reference 2024

³³GRA 2024

³⁴Rogers 2006 as cited in GRA 2024

So, while some voices may coin the specific term cultural appropriation as more neutral than others, there is a consensus that exploitative forms of this very practice exist. Accordingly, there are two particularly important factors distinguishing cultural appropriation as a form of exploitation from appropriation as the mere exchange of cultural influences on an equal level. In line with the above mentioned definitions, it becomes an exploitative practice against the background of these conditions:

Lack of recognition: appropriation of culture without knowledge or appreciation of it, or the consideration of permission and compensation

Power asymmetries: appropriation of culture by a dominant and more powerful group, often historically rooted in colonialism, as explained in the chapter above

Thus, discussions around cultural appropriation need to consider the effects of structural constraints, such as constellations of power.³⁵ Unwanted exploitative cultural appropriation emphasises these power asymmetries and becomes a representation of dominance and oppression.

Cultural appropriation can occur in many forms, as will be seen in the following chapter, very often it is characterised by the factors listed

below, all of which have been identified as threats to intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO³⁶:

Decontextualisation: describes taking something out of its original context, in this case the detachment of cultural heritage from its original history and meaning

Misrepresentation: describes depicting something in a wrong way different from its original or true meaning, in this case the use of elements contrary to their cultural significance

Commercialisation: describes subordinating cultural values to economic interests for the sake of profit, in this case the financial benefit from the cultural heritage of others.

In line with this, lawyer Susan Scafidi, author of ‘Who owns Culture?’ considers the copying and transforming of cultural products in order to adapt them to one’s own taste or to make a profit from them, as cultural appropriation.³⁷

³⁵GRA 2024

³⁶UNESCO 2018

³⁷Scafidi 2005

4.3 Cultural appropriation in the fashion industry

The fashion industry in particular profits from the exploitation of cultural heritage, while at the same time, local communities and their culture suffer a loss of meaning, value and power. The decontextualised use of culturally significant elements such as patterns, symbols or designs and the presumption of interpretative sovereignty represents the continuation of colonial structures. As cultural elements are misrepresented, they are stripped of their original significance and narratives, and presented in a way that perpetuates stereotypes rather than honouring the authentic cultural heritage they originate from. Furthermore, the commercialisation of cultural heritage turns meaningful elements into mere products of profit, ignoring their deeper social and historical contexts and also causing a loss of value and income in the culture of origin.

On the basis of the criteria developed above, two cases illustrating the problems of cultural appropriation will be discussed briefly in the following.

Case 1: The Navajo Nation

In 2012 the Navajo Nation filed a lawsuit against the US-American lifestyle brand Urban Outfitters, accusing the company of cultural appropriation of its cultural heritage and traditional symbols, after the brand offered clothing and accessories labelled as 'Navajo' and featuring designs allegedly signature to the group.³⁸ In view of the previously explained characteristics of cultural appropriation, this case makes an example for it, as will be analysed in the following:

- The appropriation takes place in a context of **power imbalance** both in terms of the economic dominance of the company, as well as against the background of the historical oppression of Indigenous people in the USA, including the Navajo Nation, rooted in colonialism.

The cultural heritage of the Navajo Nation was appropriated by the brand **without any recognition**, understanding or appreciation of their original meaning and value. When Urban Outfitters applied the Navajo name and patterns to a range of products, the original culture, history and context was **decontextualised** from their strong symbolic meaning and sacredness. The Navajo Nation was **misrepresented** by being associated with the products and the brand without being in any way connected to it or asked for their permission.³⁹

- Moreover, through **commercialisation** Urban Outfitters is making profit by selling these items without being part of the Navajo Nation as original creators or caring about compensation. Casey Brown, member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin summarises:



For many Native American artisans, it's not just a way to express and pass on their culture but their livelihood. Providing cheaper mass-produced versions of handmade pieces of that take countless hours to create cheapens the genuine product. For Urban Outfitters to sell Navajo designs under the moniker of Navajo shows colonization still exists. Many people think of colonization as dominant forces taking over Indigenous land for their own use. But intellectual colonialism is the modern manifest destiny.⁴⁰

³⁸Vogue 2016

³⁹Vice 2016

⁴⁰Vice 2016

Case 2: The Mexican Culture Minister

The Mexican Culture Minister Alejandro Frausto has criticised several US-American and European companies for the commercial use of various traditional designs from Indigenous Mexican communities.⁴¹ Again, looking at this example, the characteristics of cultural appropriation can be recognised, as the following analysis shows:

- The appropriation takes place in a context of **power imbalance** with regard to the economic and legal means of the globally operating companies in comparison to the Indigenous communities, which are among the most marginalised and poorest in Mexico, and whose concerns, such as the protection of their intellectual property, have only been addressed by the Mexican government for the first time.⁴²
- The companies are making use of cultural elements **without recognising**, knowing or respecting the original culture and its significance. The motifs, techniques and designs, are **decontextualised** and **misrepresented** by the fashion brands simply using them and integrating them into their designs without involving the originators, even though their origins are often well documented. An example for this is a design by the luxury company Louis Vuitton,

which makes use of cultural heritage originating in the village of Tenango de Doria. The embroideries concerned tell the story of the community and have a particular personal or communal significance that is disregarded in this context.⁴³

- The luxury fashion brands are **commercialising** cultural heritage offering them at a high price point without financially compensating the Indigenous communities as the original creators, who often rely on selling their handicrafts as a source of income.⁴⁴ An example for this is a cape offered by the brand Isabel Marant for the price of nearly 500 Euros, copying patterns used by the Purépecha community from Michoacán. While the company even admits that they were inspired by the original creators and declared their apologies, no financial acknowledgement was made.⁴⁵

⁴³Handelsblatt 2019 & Fashion United 2020

⁴²Handelsblatt 2019

⁴³Handelsblatt 2019

⁴⁴Handelsblatt 2019

⁴⁵Fashion Network 2024

5. Cultural sustainability in fashion

5.1 General approach

Throughout this brochure, it has been illustrated why the dimension of culture plays an essential role in sustainable development and why cultural appropriation in design is a particularly important topic to address in a sustainable fashion business. So looking at putting cultural sustainability into practice, what are the next steps to take?

Cultural sustainability in the (fair) fashion industry starts with a shift in mindset. The core question should always be: How do we prevent the appropriation of culture and limit the reproduction of colonial continuities? This requires fashion brands and designers among other actors to critically examine their roles in shaping power dynamics and cultural narratives within the global system in general and particularly in the fashion industry.

To build a truly fair and culturally sustainable fashion industry, we must reflect on how political, economic, and cultural power asymmetries shape interactions between the Global North and Global South, between dominant and marginalised cultures, and between large brands and small artisan communities. Addressing these imbalances requires a conscious effort

to preserve cultural heritage, respect traditional knowledge, and honour the originators and communities passing these practices down through generations.

Key approaches to integrating cultural sustainability

Reflecting on power dynamics: It's essential to address the unequal power relations that exist within the industry. Asymmetrical dynamics can perpetuate exploitation and cultural appropriation if not thoughtfully managed.

Preserving cultural heritage: Culturally sustainable fashion should support the preservation of traditional crafts, know-how and textile culture and ensure the cultural identity of communities is respected and passed on.

Cultural appreciation: The twelve ethical principles developed to complement the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, can guide fair fashion brands in their interactions with traditional cultures to prevent cultural appropriation. These principles include the following aspects:

- Mutual respect, esteem and appreciation for immaterial cultural heritage should prevail in interactions between states, as well as between communities and groups.
- All interactions with those who create, conserve, maintain and transmit immaterial cultural heritage should be characterised by transparent cooperation, dialogue, negotiation and consultation, and should be based on their voluntary, prior and informed consent.
- Communities should play an important role

in identifying threats to their immaterial cultural heritage, including its decontextualisation, commercialisation and misrepresentation, and be included the question of how to prevent and minimise such threats.⁴⁶

Essentially, in order to achieve truly equal and appreciative practices in the fair fashion industry, we must foster true collaboration. Instead of setting the rules for collaboration, fashion brands should encourage involvement of their artisan partners. Both, the design process but also the business conditions, should be based on genuine dialogue and equal engagement from all actors.

To foster true understanding and respect, we must go beyond surface-level gestures and actively engage in deep reflection. This begins with asking the right questions that help us confronting our own biases, understanding the broader historical, economic and political context, and ensuring that our actions uplift rather than exploit the communities we engage with.

⁴⁶UNESCO 2018

By encouraging conscious self-reflection, we can better navigate the complex dynamics of cultural exchange in a way that honours the people, practices, and histories involved.

Layla F. Saad, a well-known author, anti-racism educator, and activist, has formulated some key questions in her influential book 'Me and White Supremacy':



What is the history that exists between my culture and that culture?

What are some of the subconscious negative stereotypes and racist beliefs I have toward people of that culture?

What are ways that I can financially compensate people from the culture I am purchasing cultural elements from?

In what ways am I supporting, protecting and uplifting people from that culture in my community?

Do I understand the historic significance and sacredness of this cultural element to that culture?

Does something like this cultural element exist in my own culture?

Why is it so important to me to partake in this cultural element at the risk of offending people from that culture?

Are there ways for me to partake in this cultural element without financially benefiting from it in ways that people from that culture would not?

If I am financially benefiting, are there ways in which I can redirect some of that financial benefit toward the people of that culture?⁴⁷

⁴⁷Saad 2020

5.2 Initiatives

Across the fashion industry, various organisations are working on addressing issues of cultural appropriation, exploitation, and colonial continuities. These initiatives represent valuable examples of how decolonisation and cultural sustainability can be approached through advocacy, education, and collaboration. In the following, two initiatives are presented, whose efforts highlight different ways to create more culturally respectful and sustainable practices in fashion.

CIPRI and The 3Cs' Rule: Consent. Credit. Compensation© (2017)

The Cultural Intellectual Property Rights Initiative® (CIPRI) was founded with the mission to support cultural sustainability and act as a mediator in the fashion and crafts ecosystem. Through various strands of action, including research, consulting and education, advocacy, as well as legal strategy and policy making, CIPRI works on protecting traditional knowledge, promoting the recognition of cultural intellectual property rights® for Indigenous peoples, ethnic groups and local communities, and eliminating cultural misappropriation.

The initiative develops and implements business models that are fostering socially and culturally sustainable collaborations between craftspeople and contemporary designers in the fashion business, based on the following concept:



The 3Cs' Rule: Consent. Credit.

Compensation© is a soft law, agreement-based framework for sustainable, fair and equitable relationships with Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions Custodians who belong to Indigenous Peoples, ethnic groups and Local Communities (i.e. community, group or, if applicable, individuals).⁴⁸

This includes the free, prior and informed **consent** of the craft custodian or community; **credit** as acknowledgement in the form desired by the custodians, and **compensation** for access and use, which can be monetary, non-monetary or a combination of the two based on the requests of the craft custodians.⁴⁹

This concept by CIPRI offers a practical approach for businesses in the fashion and craft ecosystem, based on a fair distribution of intellectual property rights and cultural intellectual property.



CONSENT . CREDIT . COMPENSATION

Figure 3: The 3Cs' Rule: Consent. Credit. Compensation© by Cultural Intellectual Property Rights Initiative®⁵⁰

⁴⁸CIPRI 2024

⁴⁹CIPRI 2024

⁵⁰CIPRI 2024

Decalogue of Artisan Knowledge

Another example is the **Decalogue of Artisan Knowledge**, enriched by diverse voices and promoted by the Mexican NGO NGOimpacto, which collaborates with Indigenous communities in Los Altos de Chiapas and focuses on sustainable development.

NGOimpacto's mission is to strengthen the economic autonomy and self-management of women artisans, promoting projects that respect and foster cultural identity and the preservation of artisanal heritage. Through training and support, the NGOimpacto seeks to create opportunities for economic growth and improve the quality of life for the families involved.

The decalogue represents a joint effort toward a code of conduct that establishes ten principles focused on professionalisation, training, commercial collaboration, and conscious consumption, thus promoting ethical trade practices in the market.

This decalogue is a result of artisan-led advocacy with the goal of empowering their communities and preserving their cultural heritage. By centring artisans in these conversations, this framework fosters responsible and equitable partnerships that protect and celebrate artisan knowledge.⁵¹

⁵¹Forum Fairer Handel 2023

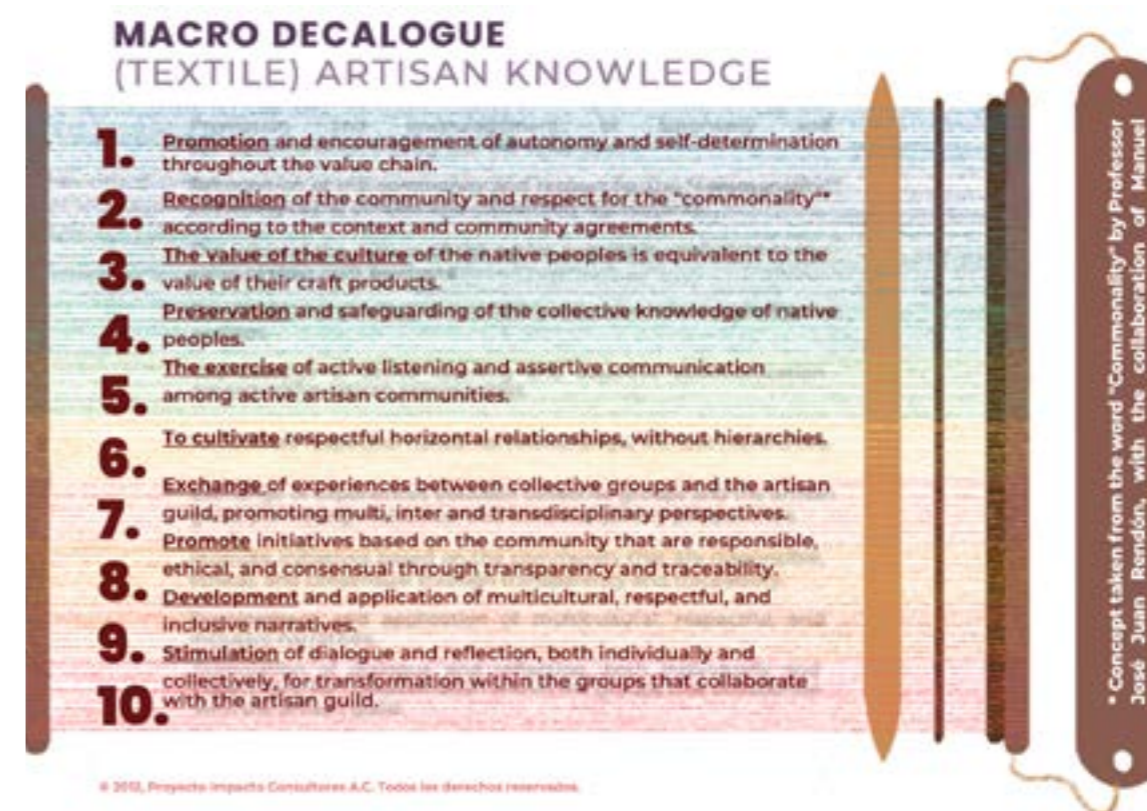


Figure 4: Macro Decalogue: (Textile) Artisan Knowledge⁵²

⁵²NGOimpacto 2024 (Personal communication)

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