CLOSING THE LOOP
Can social and solidarity organisations accelerate the circular economy?

Building a circular textiles system through social partnerships

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Overall, the global export market for worn and used clothing is estimated to be about $4 billion.
Which countries import/export the most used clothes in 2016

Trade value - US$

- Uganda: $72.3m
- Hungary: $72.5m
- Ghana: $80.6m
- India: $87.1m
- Guatemala: $97.2m
- Netherlands: $98.9m
- Tunisia: $104.8m
- Russian Federation: $117.3m
- Malaysia: $150.5m
- Pakistan: $239.5m

Imports: $1.1bn

- Italy: $118.6bn
- Canada: $126.5bn
- Belgium: $139.6bn
- Poland: $162.0bn
- Netherlands: $197.1bn
- China: $218.2bn
- Rep. of Korea: $270.1bn
- Germany: $394.5bn
- UK: $477.6bn
- USA: $575.5bn

Exports: $2.7bn

Source: BBC / United Nations
But what happens to the non-wearable waste streams?

Shredded textiles can be made into lower value products like mattress stuffing, wiping rags and sound insulation.

Fibres can be spun into yarn again, but of a much lower quality than the original material.

It is simply not financially viable, at the moment, for these items to be recycled at scale.

That is why charities and social enterprises are focused on the *reuse* of collected garments, rather than the *recycling* of textile *materials*. 
Across the globe, the equivalent of one garbage truck of textiles is landfilled or incinerated every second, according to the Ellen McArthur Foundation.

The amount of non-valorised textile waste in the EU is estimated at 9,35 million tonnes per year.
Why is it so hard to reuse/recycle?

Changing the ways in which we…
• Produce (cheap)
• Consume (fast)
• Throw away (a lot)
• Collect (sporadically)
• Sort (for established markets)
• Remanufacture (labour = expensive)
Going circular means:

- **Reduce**: Using less materials in design and manufacture.
- **Reuse**: Checking, cleaning, repairing, refurbishing items or spare parts.
- **Recycle**: Turning waste into an entirely new product.
- **Recovery**: Includes energy recovery, for example biomass fuel, and anaerobic digestion.
- **Dispose**: Landfill and incineration without energy recovery.
SDG 12 - Target 12.5:
“By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse”
Partnerships

Four case studies (BE and NL)
Cross-sectoral collaborations
  SSE-collectors & sorters,
  working with retailers, brands, technology developers and recyclers
Social employment
Shifting from product (reuse) to material (recycling)

Learnings & insights:

How can the SSE-sector maximise its role in these collaborations?
In other words, how can the circular economy become socially impactful?
**Tomorrowland**: massive volumes of waste are left behind on site – an estimated 75 tonnes per year, often tents, sleeping bags and camping equipment.

- Collaboration Ecoso (social workplace) & LoveTomorrow
- Ecoso sorts, cleans, recovers
- Camping gear is rented again to future festival visitors
- The future? Eco-design in an all-encompassing leasing scheme
De Collectie: collective scheme of the SSE-collectors & sorters in Antwerp, Belgium

- Public procurement success: exclusive right to the collection of used textiles in Antwerp
- Partnership with HNST, recycling used jeans into new ones (fibre recycling)
- Public campaign: bring back your old jeans!
- New collection models, new sorting criteria
Ateljee & IKEA

- Ateljee is a social workplace and restaurant in Gent, Belgium.
- Ateljee produced the “Återställa”-collection based on unsold stock, cut-offs and pre-consumer textile waste from IKEA.
- All items were purchased by IKEA and sold in their local store, thereby communicating the social mission behind the project to the consumers.
- Thus far a temporary initiative.
**Salvation Army / Reshare:** automated, fibre-based sorting of donated garments

- SA: one of the early pioneers of collecting used clothes for charity.
- Projects: Fibersort & Dutch Centre for Circular Textiles
- Automated detection and sorting of fibre content (non-wearable fraction)
- Ambition: recovering fibres and spinning recycled yarn
- The big unknown: how can the yarn be returned to the supply chain?
How can SSE-organisations maximise their role in a circular economy transition?

Key insights and recommendations

- Build coalitions, scale your work: within and beyond the social economy
- Define the added value of your social business model
- Invest in your communication strategy: social does not mean free
- Embrace change and automation
- Carve out a space for the SSE early on in the changing legislative framework
- Think carefully about future-proof collaborations
Circular textiles on the horizon?

• Brand transparency, Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)
• Supply chain tracking (e.g. RFID tagging)
• Landfill & incineration costs are increasing and will spike as we reach limitations, waste-to-energy incineration increasingly capital intensive.
• A huge opportunity for the SSE in the collecting, sorting, repairing and remanufacturing of waste textiles.
• Increasing volumes of textile waste… where is eco-design at the moment?
Thank you!

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