ARCTIC TO ANTARCTIC

LEARNING FROM FASHION'S OLDEST

JOSHUA MARK WILLIAMS

BIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

Rationale

The United Kingdom has a long and resounding history in clothing and textiles manufacture. The cloth and clothes from this small island have supported humans to achieve great things. The great river walks of our time by Levison Wood (the Nile) and Ed Stafford (the Amazon) were both achieved with boots made in Yorkshire. On their polar expeditions, although a hundred years apart, Captain Scott wore woollen garments made in Leicestershire, whilst Ranulph Fiennes wears high-tech down from Cheshire. I have long been captivated by cold places, and long cared for the fashion industry I have grown up in. Both factors set this project in motion. A long, cold journey from the cold shores of the Antarctic ocean to Arctic Alaska began.

In recent years the broader fashion industry has declined, and it is the aim of this paper is to investigate how it can be revived. To being with I will paint a picture of today's UK fashion and textiles industry. An industry that has found itself at the centre of the globalisation debate. Economics plays a central role, both of the market and the consumer. Jobs and skills, and sustainability and the environment are discussed, as well as looking at the main shifts that have occurred. From this platform of where fashion is in the UK today, the paper can then reach across the atlantic to question what we can learn from the world's oldest clothing makers.

UK Context

Seven hundred years ago Edward III ordered that his Lord Chancellor sit on a bale of wool whenever council was held. A symbolic reminder of the importance of wool trade to the British crown. The Lord Speaker of the House of Lords still sits on that Woolsack. That importance endured into the twentieth century. At its peak in 1977 the number of jobs in the sector was 900,000 people, but the cracks were beginning to show. By the 1970s British textiles was at a comparative disadvantage and had become an unproductive industry. Its terms of trade was negative, importing more that it was exporting (mainly finished clothing) and import price penetration of cheap overseas clothing was high (Broadbent, 2017:5). The result was an unceremonious decline - a fall in jobs by 85% over a quarter of a century (Fitzgerald, 2016) and dramatic drop in production. The story of the UK textiles industry is infamous in the broader narrative of globalisation. A reading of the news tells of communities without purpose, and historic mills falling quiet. However, there are two sides to every story; although the sector has been particularly affected by overseas imports, consumers benefited. The Bank of England highlighted that during the period as a direct result of cheaper clothing households felt a real income rise of three percent every year, even during times of high inflation and price rises (Broadbent 2017).

In this utilitarian telling as trade and jobs fall in one sector so they rise in emerging sectors that have the comparative advantage. The point is that it is not just wool or the textiles trade that is important but all trade, both inwards and outwards. It is this trade that creates wealth. Ironically in 1938 it was discovered that the Woolsack was filled with horsehair. It was emptied and re-stuffed with wool brought to Westminster from all corners of the Commonwealth (HL Deb 03 Aug 1965, vol 269 c116). In this way the Woolsack is still a fitting symbol - a message of trade, cooperation and aspirations for peace.

To begin this paper with the economic arguments against the very industry I have grown up in may seem an odd choice. But a realistic economic portrayal of UK textiles is necessary if solutions are to be found. Moreover, the blinkered following of market-forces has not been without difficulty. Predicting the future is notoriously difficult. In economics this creates what psychologists call a low-validity environment (see Kahneman, 2011:223). When offshoring was the trend, few considered the longer term impact of external factors such as the rising cost of fuel. Even fewer predicted the Great Recession of 2008-13 and the impact it would have on currency rates and purchasing power parity. Not all of the effects felt have been negative. One of the positive impacts has been a small rise in UK production. This is largely due to the fall in the value of sterling and an increased need for supply chain flexibility (Drapers, 2016). Although the textiles sector is smaller than it once was the total value currently stands at £9.1bn, contributing £28.1bn to the UK economy (UKFT, 2017:1).

The positive effect on UK textiles was due not only to market economics but in patterns of consumption. Consumers bore a new awareness of provenance that had largely been absent (UKFT, 2010:80). In short, people became more interested in where clothing was made. The increase of homegrown manufacturing and nearshoring reflected the industry's response to both. Arcadia group brought production back to the UK via suppliers such as London-based Fashion Enter (Guardian, 2014). John Lewis and M&S introduced made in UK ranges. Trade shows such as Meet the Manufacturer and Make It British popped up showcasing new start-ups manufacturing fashion on home soil.

But the picture is a varied one. The old heritage brands whose workers are master craftspeople are the ones who are still struggling to sustain themselves. A friend who is a product-designer for a well known UK shoe brand spoke to me on the loss of these skills. Their company wished they had kept open just one of their thirty UK factories so that they could retrain

anew. For them it is too late. The successes are often the anonymous fast-fashion operations producing large runs for low quality using cheap labour. Had many of the factories not closed and many workers not left the industry then the £9.1 billion value of UK textiles would surely be higher.

The examples so far have been larger fashion companies. Within UK textiles, however, 80% of the businesses are micro-SMEs. Their workforces are ageing and the invaluable knowledge they have is fading (UKFT, 2017:8). We can't predict the future (as with fuel prices and currency rates) but we can learn from some of the failings of outsourcing and offshoring. The collapse of Carillion (the UK's second largest construction company) is being held up by the political left as a failure of the outsourced model (Parker and Tetlow, 2018). The political economy in post-Brexit Britain is also beginning to shift, moving away from the centrality of the market to a greater focus on jobs and skills. A substantial study by the Alliance Project (2015) shows that by 2020 manufacturing in the UK could contribute £500m more each year to the economy as well as creating 10,000 new jobs (in PWC, 2016).

A central question in the debate around the UK and global fashion is that of the industry's sustainability. This is also not without complexity. On the one hand there is the consumer demanding more frequent fashion, and on the other an upward pressure on the environment. A study by Cornell University says the fashion seasons are up from four a year to as many as fifteen for high street retailers (Lewis in Yun Tan, 2016) and according to the Swiss Environment Office and the UNEP (2015) we have already overstretched certain planetary boundaries. Last year Briton's insatiable desire for fashion left 300,000 tonnes of material waste in its wake (Smithers, 2016). Reconciling our demand for new clothes, with pressures on the planet, is probably the biggest question fashion faces.

Key Findings

With these challenges in mind I travelled from the shores of the Antarctic Ocean to Alaska to meet with and learn from the world's oldest UNESCO clothing makers. The span of geography was vast, and the cultures vastly different. I met many people and communities along the way. I was fortunate enough to meet and experience the generosity of the:

—Mapuche, Chile
—Aymara, Bolivia
—Ecuadorians, Ecuador
—Inupiat, Alaska

The UK already leads in fashion design, innovation and e-commerce. What then can the UK learn from traditional or tribal groups on the other side of the world? These communities focus on their deep knowledge of traditional making techniques passed down over the centuries, their cultural heritage and in some cases a harmony with the environment. It is this that I am interested in. By marrying culture with commerce the UK could further enrich the made in UK brand. By linking the environment with our economics we will preserve skills and so a sector so it can be passed down to the next generation.

UK FASHION CAN BUILD ON ITS CULTURAL HERITAGE

The following key findings would have a positive influence on the UK fashion and textiles industry:

—Recognise and build upon the value of cultural heritage by measuring it in our fashion and textiles industry and engendering a celebratory culture in wider British society.
—Create a unified response to the environmental cost of our fashion and textiles industry at enterprise and industry levels using digital technology.

—Encourage collaboration between the fashion and textiles industry, academia, government and/or NGOs.

Such initiatives could support cultural heritage, the environment as well as vocational education so knowledge can be transferred to the next generation. There is case for the geographical status of clothing, similar to the EU's instrument that protects agricultural products and foodstuffs. No such instrument exists in the UK or EU for clothing.

Challenges

Whilst on the travel fellowship the challenges facing the communities I visited became obvious. Over the past half century environmental change, questions over land rights and economic inequities have made poverty commonplace. Pressures on family, community and traditional gender roles are prevalent. Identity issues are common, both collective and individual, traditional and gendered. All of these issues underpin a worrying pattern of mental health issues and in extreme cases - suicide. When meeting these communities and faced with these issues, I had to question the role and relevance of fashion. In the UK, fashion still can be seen as a trivality or affectation. However, in Latin America and Alaska clothing making is a touchstone for many people, rooting communities in their land and in their ancestral past. The extent of the timeless social function of clothing making in these places has lead them to be recognised by UNESCO for their intangible cultural heritage. 'Fashion involves the making of meaning (identity and belonging) and of matter (its material and 3D contents)' (Williams, 2016), and for these communities their identity and belonging were transferred and consolidated with every stitch.

Overseas UNESCO Context

Wherever I went the textiles told a story of people and place, of a multitude of actors, or of a physical world interwoven between flora and fauna. Some went as far as to weave life and death into their tapestries telling of a metaphysical domain. The Aymara in Bolivia and Peru are such people. They face their ancestral past through tapestry weaving on traditional back-strap looms. For the Jalq-a and Tarabuco communities, stories are told in the material. The tapestries speak of the fragile fault line between the dynamism of the living and the chaos of the spirit realms; of the unknowable future and the certain past; of ancestors alive and dead. You can see a culture woven together with the physical and spiritual worlds as warp and weft. Though the present world changes, their making ties them to a world that transcends time. It is also rooted in it. Twenty years ago the mountains started making an appearance in their work, symbolising the movement of their people.

The impact of challenges such as migration and change faced by different communities was often great, but so too was the cultural wisdom. Although it is the wisdom that this report focuses on it cannot be considered outside of the social context. The social context is one of a myriad of individuals, agencies and partnerships working with or against each other in an attempt to further different visions of change. These actors varied from local community groups, national government departments, anthropologists, charities, development Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), private companies and cultural organisations such as museums.

When those visions aligned, the projects were collaborative, inclusive as well as being financially sound and politically impartial, then projects were more often successful. Often when the communities were successful in addressing their own challenges, then there was most to learn for the UK.

Terminology

By discussing the world's oldest clothing makers we are referring to several indigenous communities whose clothing and textile weaving traditions put them on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage register. UNESCO is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. Tradition are customs or beliefs that are passed from one generation to the next. Traditional clothing makers in the UNESCO context will be artisans, normally working within the community setting whilst in the UK they are larger operations and more commercial but still building on inherited knowledge. Tradition can be considered in a similar way to cultural heritage. UNESCO (2017) understand that, 'cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants'. The intangible cultural heritage register document recognises such expressions. These are submitted via an application process and an annual review from the UNESCO States Parties (2003).

When we think of fashion we normally think of the rapidly changing collections and trends within clothing. Fashion can be considered, 'an intangible system of signification' (Rocomora and Smelik 2015), as a way of giving meaning. However, this paper won't refer to the semiotics, only the industry as whole. The textiles industry largely refers to the production of yarn, cloth and clothing. The fashion industry is similar but is normally inclusive of fashion retail, marketing and distribution. It is that which I will largely refer to.

CHILE

Trilla festival of the huaso culture.
Alto Ramírez.
Altitude, near sea level.
34.5° S, 71.9° W.

Context

Chile has a rich indigenous heritage spanning its 2600 mile coastline, the Mapuche make up the most part of the native population, based largely south of Santiago. In the north are the smaller Aymara and Quechua groups whose numbers pepper the high plains and the great salt flats into Bolivia and Peru. Despite the cultural richness, design and craft (or arte in Spanish) is a polarising issue. Much is to do with historic tensions. In post-Pinochet Chile successive governments have been quick to embrace multinational investment and foreign trade at the cost of indigenous people's homeland (Barrera-Hernández, 2010). This has taken the form of rapid exchanges of land for oil. The politics of the government's Direccion Sociocultural courts the indigenous minority and is sympathetic to their culture. Through different initiatives it supports cultural activity, though it is still a branch of politics and cannot be viewed in isolation. The government encourage collaboration between traditional and contemporary design, especially if it is entrepreneurial. Their current approach aims to celebrate traditional makers and to ensure a future of some kind for indigenous artisans.

Findings

—The government takes an active role in supporting traditional clothing and textile design through cultural promotion.
—The government encourages and funds collaboration between academia, third sector, enterprise and indigenous culture.
—The government attracts entrepreneurial talent through schemes such as Start Up Chile.

Contemporary Designer [Santiago]

In her upbeat textiles studio in downtown Santiago conversations with Karen Barbé (2016) revolve around cultural heritage and design. As a modern textile designer in the heart of Chile's capital, Karen finds herself in the middle of the debate as to the responsibility her craft gives her. As opposed to the views of some of her peers she sees it as her right, even her obligation, to draw on inspiration from Chile's indigenous Mapuche people. Greater numbers of mestizo or mixed race Chileans are now identifying themselves as indigenous. At the time of the last census it stood at approximately 10% of Chile's population (Casen, 2013). This has doubled from 4.6% in 2002 (INE, 2002).
From a history of marginalisation, through a dialogue of rights and protest, Chile is part of a pan latin-american narrative of the acceptance and celebration of indigenous people. Parallel to this societal shift, Karen is part of a growing trend in the design sector of working with patterns, colours and weaves synonymous with indigenous peoples.

"*It used to be that we were ashamed to be Mapuche. Now we are proud of it. How can we not be? We are all Mapuche.*" (Barbé, 2016)

Government [Santiago]

The government support artisanal makers using online platforms. Artesanias de Chile is an online space for indigenous makers. The website www.artesaniasdechile.cl falls somewhere between the role of cultural ambassador, trade mission and e-commerce store. The website has a strong content marketing element engaging a social media audience of 25,000 people (Williams, 2017). Their short films of indigenous people are educative and insightful. To some extent the participants talk of their aspirations, the main subject being the continuation of their traditions. The difficulty arises when they begin to talk of the hardships they endure or their concerns for the future. At that point the subtitling stops and comes back in when they thank the training programme for helping their employability prospects (see Fundacion, 2017). That the government's Ministry of Labour pursues education and training programmes is a positive step towards cultural preservation but would be better to take a politically agnostic approach.

Third Sector [Santiago]

The role of the third sector is an important way of mitigating this political bias. Other social enterprises exist in a similar space to Artesanias de Chile serving online customers with traditional Chilean textiles and craft. Web-based social enterprises such as www.ikuna.cl and www.chileamano.com are often based out of quasi-academic incubation centres. They are up to date with the changes in technology and are aware of the shifts in market feeling around solely commercial and not-for-profit ventures. The people running them are educated and globally connected. Although essentially doing the same thing, these social enterprises are distanced from the politics. They sit in a middle ground where they are part funded by the government so are cushioned from the competitiveness that comes with being completely market driven. As such the social enterprise is able to allow traditional products to remain unchanged rather than updating designs to suit demand.

Enterprise [Santiago]

The Chilean government is pro-business, and has set up a leading scheme to encourage entrepreneurship called Startup Chile. It is also tackling gender inequality by having a specific seed fund for female entrepreneurs called the S factory. The collective value of the start-ups is 1.4 billion USD (Startup Chile, 2017).

Learnings for the UK

By part-funding incubation spaces the Chilean government is facilitating a transition between education and industry for students and postgraduates. Through a remit of promoting traditional design and craft the talent of university students and staff is being harnessed to find solutions. UK universities are largely ahead in such areas as post-graduate incubation, but underrepresented by the fashion sector. The 'breathing space' provided

by incubation centres allows a greater focus on cultural heritage and sustainability.

By part-funding the social enterprise vehicle, founders and stakeholders are promoting Chile and traditional Chilean design. The social enterprise business model is an important vehicle by which traditional making endures in Chile. As certain sectors become less commercially popular in the UK the social enterprise model could fill the gap.

Collaborative arrangements in Chile exist in different forms involving different government ministries, the private sector and academia. In the UK it is worth considering which stakeholders have a confluence of interest in promoting the fashion and textiles industry, or smaller segments within it. This could be for example a local tourist board with the local chamber of commerce who along with a creative agency could create an online experience of a region's traditional design heritage. Madein.Wales is a good example of design-led regional promotion website for the Cardiganshire area though

it has remained static for some time. If it had a small amount of funding as well as backing from a local tourist board and/or a local college with the founders retaining creative control it could prove successful driver of growth in the region.

World Craft Council [Santiago]

In conversation with Tita Celina (Williams, 2016), former president of the World Craft Council, we debated the relationship between traditional and contemporary craft. Tita argued that the traditional maker (in Chile) replicates exactly what he has learned from his parents (they are generally male). In pursuit of his cultural expression he recreates the past with little or no deviation. The contemporary craftsman, on the other hand, is free to draw upon influence and innovate as he or she likes. To realise cultural and spiritual expression, Mapuche artisans must replicate the work of their forebears, 'en esencia y en sentido', (ibid) in essence and in sense. That way they bring their ancestry with them. She tells me in Spanish, the whole way of the Mapuche is translated into their weaving. But it could be viewed the other way around. Whilst the Mapuche weave their culture into their tapestries, they also weave their tapestries into their culture. By weaving they lend value to that which they have created. For them, weaving becomes a pursuit of meaning into and of itself.

"Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun."
(Geertz, 1973:5)

Herein lies the tension. The meaning for the Mapuche is an accumulation of generations of learning whereas the president and the parliament are only in power for four years. Governance would push to evolve traditional designs that have remained the same for millennia.

Consider the parallel of tangible culture and its treatment by the British Museum (a world leader in the conservation, exhibition and analysis of cultural objects). Their Head of Collections, Anthony Spence, explains how handling of British Museum collections always errs on the side of caution. Any change involves a myriad of reports on facilities, security and condition, each broken down into many sub-sections. Decisions are never taken without a full understanding of the implications and government indemnity (Spence, 2017). These rigorous processes are in place to safeguard what are priceless cultural artefacts.

Summary

If the intangible cultural heritage of Chile's indigenous people is to be preserved, a middle ground might be found where the historic past is allowed to evolve into the future. The view of a temporal eternalism is precarious in that although the Mapuche embrace unity between their ancestral past and the present, the world they inhabit is in constant flux. A more evolutionary approach views culture as dynamic and adaptive (eg. Boyd, 1983). The Chilean government's National Council for Culture and Art (2017) views culture in this more fluid capacity, as we do in Britain. Though here in the UK we are perhaps too focussed on (economic driven) change. A middle ground in Chile might view the tradition of design and making as a progression where modern interpretations stretch back, related to its history and still part of it. This is something we could learn from in the UK - to look back in order to look forward. For fashion's 'modern interpretations' to meet with the slow fashion of traditional makers. There is knowledge in the traditional side of the UK's fashion industry, it just needs to be shared. The barriers are the divisions in age, profession and class - demographics that separate the fashion industry physically as well as socially. These divisions often represent a rural-urban divide with fast fashion in the cities and traditional fashion in the country. For UK fashion and textiles to grow sustainably whilst building upon the value of our cultural heritage, these barriers need to be somehow broken down and this knowledge shared.

BOLIVIA

The Atacama, border crossing
through the world's driest desert.
Altitude, 4,350 metres.
22.8° S, 67.8° W.

Context

As arid northern Chile turns into Bolivia the people are poorer and the politics of the country more turbulent. The indigenous population of Bolivia make up 41% (IWGIA, 2017) of the just over 11 million inhabitants who live there (worldometers, 2017). Their incumbent president, Evo Morales, is regarded as Latin America's first indigenous leader (BBC, 2016). He is widely loved by the rural communities of Bolivia, and seen as a champion of the poor. Although not immediately evident, poverty in Bolivia has declined. From approximately 61% in 2005 it reduced to 39% in 2013. Despite these overall improvements, in the rural regions 60% of the population are still considered impoverished (IFAD, 2016).

Findings in Bolivia

—Success of traditional making is down to projects such as ASUR, collaborative arrangements made up of community and NGO ethnographers within a commercial museum offering. They operate independently from government.
—The state of Bolivia's Aymara weaving is improving technically and evolving artistically due to pragmatism and constant reflection.

Government [La Paz]

Under Morales the government has attempted to shape a more inclusive national identity for Bolivia and to work against inequality. Evo Morales' economic policy (dubbed Evonomics) resists neoliberalism and overseas intervention and takes a state-led approach (World Bank, 2014). His industrial policy has reclaimed oil and gas resources and put them into state ownership, and the wealth has been diverted into development funds. Helped by exploiting oil and gas, Bolivia's GDP growth over the last nine years has averaged 4.7% (World Bank,

2014). Despite being something of a hero to the poorest peasant communities around Bolivia, his government has not been without contention. Under the Native Indigenous and Peasant Communities Development Fund (FDPPIOYCC) indigenous peoples were empowered to shape their own social and economic development. Established under the Hydrocarbons Law 3058 in 2005 it managed 153 different regional development projects. However, in 2016 it was found that over one million US dollars had been embezzled by the fund's regional leaders (IWGIA: 2016, 172). In response the government has decided to centrally control the fund.

Challenges to democracy have also been at stake. As I crossed the mountainous terrain in early 2016 the country geared itself up for a referendum. The question was whether the incumbent President could change the constitution to be voted into power indefinitely. Large swathes of the countryside supported President Evo Morales, 'Evo SI' daubed across many

roads, buildings and walls. In the capital the story was not so clear. The urban middle class spoke of no alternative than to vote yes, of a strong socialist grip on power that is slipping but without which lies chaos. Despite such fears, the vote went against Morales by 51% to 49% (Guardian, 2016), but not without unrest. Whilst I was in La Paz rioting broke out and the government's municipal building in En Alto was set fire. The police did not disperse the crowds so the fire brigade could not combat the blaze. Six people died. Considering the corruption of Bolivia's judiciary, police and public administration (Transparency International, 2017), it is perhaps unsurprising that the most successful project I found did not involve the government.

Social Development NGO [Sucre]

ASUR is a social development NGO working with indigenous communities in Bolivia. Much of their development work involves weaving. ASUR stands for the rather long Foundation for Anthropological Research and Ethno-development, Anthropologists of the Southern Andes. A group of anthropologists founded the organisation and textiles museum in 1989. The museum acts as a hub for the field-based work of the ASUR community, though it is successful in its own right. It has collections dating back to the 14th century showing to an audience of 12 million people a year. ASUR have been instrumental in revitalising and even elevating traditional weaving in the region. The Jalq-a and Tarabuco people are central to the project. They help source the collections which often tell stories of their people.

Nayra was the matriarch of a large family in Tarabuquillo. Her name means eye, meaning she had the gift of clarity, insight or even clairvoyance. A sprawl of generations spilled from her home. Wooden walls, partially clad. A rough trod floor and no electricity. As is the case with many rural Bolivians she ran a small farmstead from her home. Chickens clucked and alpaca roamed. When time permitted Nayra would weave. With friends or alone, it didn't matter.

As the years passed so the family grew. Still her home was dark in the evenings. To buy lights for her home she decided to weave a new tapestry, the most beautiful she could. During the next six months Nayra was to weave her best work. Flecks of black and white warp and weft danced between her fingers. Thousands of hours of understanding played out. When she came to the final strands of material she knew she had finished. Nayra died right at the end of her creation.

The museum displaying the tapestry left it on the loom in her memory. It is titled 'Weaving of the Light'. Weaving of the Light represents the Ukhu Pacha, the interior sacred world and the one that is the most expressive. Expressiveness is present in the depths and hidden places. As such obscurity and chaos maintain the right to be imperfect qualities. The two colour visual code can indicate the rupture of order, representing the diabolical entities of the underworld. It features the demonic forms of the khurus and Supay. The reds and blacks are typical of the region. Yarns are died with various herbs, plants and insects found in the area including ground cochineal beetle, carmine (scarlet red), indigo, misuk'a flowers, q'illa khichka, eucalyptus, molle t'ula, ch'akatiya, china t'ula (ASUR, 2016: 6.6). This closeness with the environment is ever present in the weavings.

ASUR believe the success of their projects is due to a combination of two things: generating economic income whilst developing aesthetic creativity. All the while Jaiq'a and Tarabuco production is not folkloricised. They view and treat it as a living tradition, taking an approach of sensitivity with common sense, preservation with pragmatism. This pragmatism is embraced in the Jaiq'a and Tarabuco people as much as with ASUR. They recognise that change is always present in any living tradition. They have confronted these societal changes through an impassioned search to tell stories characteristic of each region through their weaving (ASUR, 2016: 3.1).

The Jaiq'a and Tarabuco woven tapestries are the culmination of four thousand years of weaving heritage. Due to the complexities of the designs the

tapestries are considered works of art. The culture of making is highly creative. Weavers draw inspiration from archives of hundreds of designs in a process of constant search and renewal. If you cast your eyes back over older tapestries they show similar motifs as the modern; depictions of life and death, the interior and exterior worlds. Similar black and red colours dominate. Where they differ is in their complexity, for the older pieces show gaps or 'white space' between motif characters. In more recent years the community has learned to intersect each segment of design with the next, creating a continuous linear pattern. As the Director of ASUR's (2016) museum put it to me,

"*We are witnessing the rebirth of indigenous and traditional art. Without permanent reflection by the weavers themselves on their productive activity there could not have been an evolution.*"

Learnings for the UK

What then can UK fashion learn from a philosophy and a people that might seem so different? To begin with, the self-reliance and self determination of the Bolivian people living in quite difficult circumstance. This can be seen in the pragmatism, humility and intelligence of the ASUR museum programme. By embracing and learning from the people it is trying to serve, everyone is vested in the programme's success. It is not a cooperative, but the vision is very strong and represents the voice of all those it serves. The development of the community's textile art is occurring on a large geographical scale across remote locations, but somehow with unity. The reflective process means that challenges are responded to and new knowledge is shared across the community. Then there is the pragmatism; an awareness of the challenging, changeable landscape of the country in which they live, and the courage to face it head on. These learnings are more about traits than processes. An organisational psychology that is shaping the culture to embrace heritage as power.

ECUADOR

The Andes, longest continental mountain range in the world. Cordillera Central.
Altitude 5,271m.
13.3° S, 72.5° W.

Context

Ecuador is a country of vibrant ecology and dangerous geology. Two great cordilleras of volcanoes, the most active in the world, split the country in two. Ecuador's urban centres are a blend of Spanish colonial architecture and modern glass buildings. It has a much more American flavour than its Latin American neighbours. Gas guzzling SUVs trundle through Cuenca's cobbled streets and US dollars flow through the tills of Quito's designer shops.

Economically and socially Ecuador is doing well. According to the United Nations Development Programme (2015), Ecuador has met seven of the eight Millennium Development Goals (a globally agreed development target). The economy has grown by thirty percent from 2010 to 2015 reaching a GDP of £100.18 billion (Trading Economics, 2017) and the gini measure of social inequality has dropped from 54.12 in 2005 to 45.38 in 2014 (World Bank, 2017). Despite these advances there is a consistent tension between the government, the capital and indigenous peoples which regularly escalates into conflict (discussed in the IWGIA report, 2016). As a result of their consistent economic growth over three consecutive years the World Bank graduated Ecuador's status to an upper-middle income country. A side point but nonetheless important to note is that the European Commission has removed Ecuador from its General System of Preferences (EC, 2015:25), a mechanism for reduced tariff entry into the EU common market.

Findings

There is global demand for the panama hat. The government promote their favourite product at many opportunities, including for a time on all public sector email signatures. Designation of origin is clear and celebrated. Some private sector initiatives in Ecuador use GPS tracking to show where different elements of the supply chain are located. The cooperative model has

worked successfully for individual hat-makers. They now have access to the machinery need to finish their hats, bypassing a section of the supply chain and keeping more of the profit themselves.

Industry

The sombrero di paja tolquilla, or panama hat is of world renown. Despite having adopted the name from neighbouring Panama (its original export hub), a genuine panama is hand woven in Ecuador. This tradition of hat weaving is embedded in community and now recognised by UNESCO (2012) as contributing to the cultural richness of humanity.

The panama hat industry in Ecuador is largely successful with a mature global market. There is a foundation layer of artisanal hat makers, or toquilleras. They are based in rural areas and are rooted in community and tradition. Where Ecuador

departs from other Latin American economies is that above the traditional makers you have an industrialised layer. A series of factories based around Cuenca and Guayaquil that transform the handwoven hoods into steam processed hats. This layer has been essential in the commercialisation of the panama hat industry worldwide. Similar to the overall economy, the panama hat industry in Ecuador has grown massively over a decade. Global exports accounted for 517,000 USD in 2003 to six million USD in 2013 (The Economist 2014). However, the socio-economic makeup of the hat-making industry mirrors the same tensions the country faces. Indigenous people represent 7% of the population (UNHCR, 2014) and makeup the most part of the weaving communities (UNESCO, 2012). There is concern that this community is being exploited by ruthless middlemen, known locally as 'perros', literally dogs (see Somers, 2015). Despite the rise in global popularity of the panama hat some of the communities making them are suffering from increases in suicide rates among their young, and an exodus of men who leave Ecuador to become economic migrants.

Cooperative [Sigsig, Ecuador]

The village of Sigsig where I undertook research was recorded as having a 7:1 ratio of women to men (ibid). In response to these challenges the women of Sigsig founded the Women's Cooperative. I visited them in the hills above Cuenca.

Two women run for a bus, cutting the village square in two. Their vast skirts flap in the breeze. Layers and shades of pinks and reds. Hands grasp bundles of straw, their fingers suspended mid-weave. A neat fan-like display in copious mass. Beyond them a lonely farmer tends his bulls. A sodden clump, a tuft of grass. Long tethers lost down the grassed slope. My boots scuff on the dusty road. A nod, a buendia. The farmer points me out of town.

—Diary entry, Sigsig, 23 Mar 16

The Women's Cooperative is a jovial place. It is based in a large Spanish era building with high ceilings, pillars and cool stone floors. Further buildings flank an expansive courtyard. People bustle about in good humour.

During the making of a panama hat it is the hand weaving process that takes the weeks, months and a mastery of work. However, at the end of this you have a hood not a hat. It looks more like a bell - campana in spanish. It is the finishing process when the hat comes to life. To do this you need expensive machinery (although there are a few rare makers in Montecristi who are able to finish by hand). This means that most individual makers are cut out of the supply chain early on.

The Women's Cooperative in Sigsig solves this problem through a tried and tested model of collective ownership. They have all the machines needed to bring a panama hat to completion. Here the region's weavers can finish their hats and export them around the world. Each woman has an allocated amount of time that they can use the facilities, but in reality they are there often. Fitting in hat making around tending their small-holdings. Weaving is very much a social as well as commercial occupation. This cooperative model has enabled the women of Sigsig to survive if not thrive in the face of difficult circumstance. They are protected from exploitation and have autonomy as well as peer support with the production of their hats.

Enterprise [Montecristi]

Montecristi has global renown for producing the world's finest panama hats. The region is low and coastal, the area; warm and humid. The town is a harmony of palm trees, community volleyball, street food and Church attendance. A place poorer than you would imagine for somewhere of such fame. Concrete buildings pepper the streets unfinished, a bristle of steel rods pointing skywards. The toquilleras of Montecristi can be found on these rooftops, in court yards and living rooms. Weaving is a sociable, jocular activity. Many spend

all day and much of the night applying their craft. Plastic chairs or wooden blocks are modified so as not to interrupt the flow of the weaving. The seats are cut out and replaced with rope. The long leaves of the paja tolquilla run upwards from the floor. Each strand trimmed in half by a long thumbnail, then halved again. Makers' fingers move backwards and forwards plaiting the leaves with subconscious dexterity.

—Diary entry, Montecristi, 13 April 2016

Down an unmarked driveway, past a woman washing clothes. Here is a stepped courtyard with a quiet energy. A wooden shelter catches some of the sun's strong rays. An elderly man trims palm leaves with a machete then drags them by. They scrape along the floor like the sound of a spent wave on a coarse, sandy beach. Panama hats and hoods are in abundance. Some laid on stones that look like coal. Another batch rest on a great aloe vera plant. Each hat on its own cactus leaf, hanging in inclination. The same as they will on some distant hat peg someday.

In April 2016 an earthquake measuring 7.8 on the richter scale hit the whole country. The epicentre was on the west coast, badly affecting Manta (including Montecristi), Pedernales and Portoviejo. The day before the quake I left Montecristi and was in Cuenca.

On the balcony humidity hung whilst rain squalls painted patterns on a far off horizon. The art on the wall was beautiful, though my eyes drifted to the cracks that snaked sideways and away. The calm shattered like a dropped glass. The crockery clinked and clacked whilst the curtains swung to an unknown time. I grabbed my coat and ran down the stairs, taking three a time, sometimes four. Vocal children poured out of rooms, all around. In this flock we fled. I fixated on the staircase weight, on the cracks I had seen. Outside we found distance from the building and watched it sway. The anti seismic kept us safe. In Montecristi buildings were levelled with people inside.

—Diary entry, Montecristi, 16 April 2016

A total of 602 were killed, 12,492 were injured and 4430 buildings were destroyed. (Earthquake-Report, 2016). It is estimated the earthquake of April 2016 cost the economy of Ecuador three percentage points of GDP (World Bank, 2016) and they are still recovering. Friends I made in Montecristi and Cuenca survived.

Supply Chain

Certain pockets of UK society have long held an affection for the panama hat. This can be seen at a glance of any British hosted tennis or cricket event. Traditionally UK retailers have bought panama hats to sell from British hatmakers. These makers have historically bought the hoods from Ecuador and finished them in England. This process involves giving the hat form, edging the brim, adding a headband, a lining, a brand mark and occasionally a royal warrant. Brands such as Christys' of England, Olney Headwear and Locke and Co have long filled this niche. As some of the oldest hat manufacturers themselves they have long preferred to make and use their own blocks, thus creating hat shapes and styles to their own design.

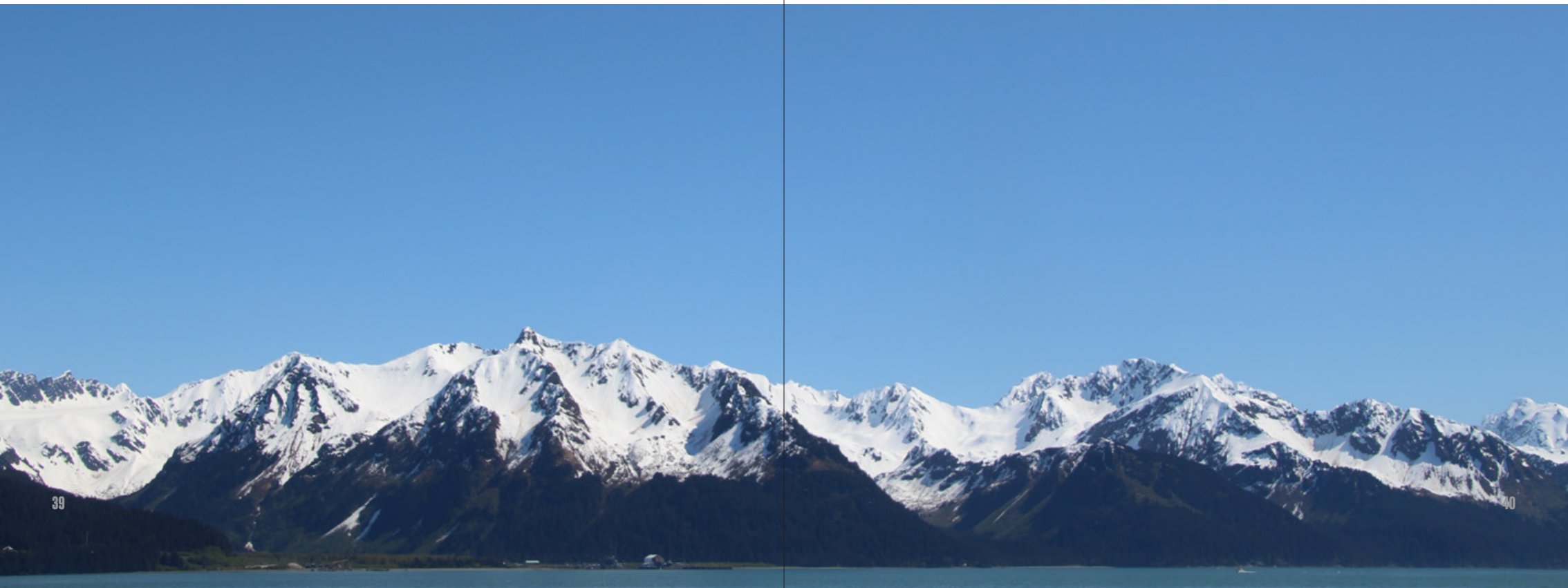
For many years the Ecuadorians' expertise was in the weaving, leaving making to the overseas operations. In recent years they have imported the machinery needed to finish the hats themselves. This has enabled some clothing retailers and brands to bypass parts of the supply chain in order to have a closer relationship with the makers. Pachacuti is run by Carol Somers, a fashion activist and entrepreneur. The fashion label was the first company in the world to be Certified by World Fair Trade Organization against the Fair Trade Sustainable Management System (Reg No UK001-2009). This involved geo tagging their supply chain in order to attain full transparency as well as working towards certain UN Millennium Development Goals. Somers completed a robust process where she created a map with GPS locations that highlighted where their own label panama hats are made, and the paja tolquilla plant sourced.

Learnings for the UK

The women's cooperative in Sigsig is an example of using underutilised space, knowledge exchange and mutual support to create an ecosystem. This model would lend itself to UK mills and clothing factories. The businesses operating in these buildings have all of the required machinery but often cannot afford to be open full time. Cooperatives of freelance designers or textiles students could buy into failing businesses or rent out the space and machinery on spare days.

ALASKA

Seward, Kenai Fjords National Park.
Starting point of the Iditarod dog sled race.
Altitude, sea level.
60.1° N, 149.4° W.



Context

Alaska is a land of extremes. The great expanse of wilderness is beautiful, its vastness hard to comprehend. Despite having adapted to one of the world's most inhospitable places, the inuit people living north of the Arctic circle face challenges still. Human induced climate change is underway in the Arctic to the point where it is considered a global hotspot for climate change activity (Ford et al., 2014). Temperatures have been increasing at twice the global average (IPCC, 2007b) and Arctic sea-ice has reduced in every season and in every successive decade since 1979 (IPCC 2014:4).

When I arrived in Anchorage the snow had barely begun to thaw. The level of homelessness was striking. In an area of a few blocks in downtown Anchorage I counted over one hundred native people sleeping rough. People filled the small squares with makeshift beds wearing many layers of clothes to keep out the cold. According to a study there are actually 300-400 homeless (Palsha, 2016).

Cooperative [Anchorage, Alaska]

Oomingmak is an Alaskan co-operative owned by 250 Native Alaskan women from remote coastal villages. They handknit Qiviut items (pronounced kiv-ee-ute), which is the downy-soft underwool from the Arctic musk ox. The wool is is shed naturally each year in Spring and collected by the community. Each village has a signature pattern derived from traditional aspects of village life and the Eskimo culture; they may come from an ancient artifact or a beadwork design.
The success of the programme can be seen in the autonomy its members have. The economics of the cooperative mean its members can benefit from being able to sell their goods in a capital city, whilst maintaining rural lives on the coast.

Findings from Alaska

The most interesting finding from this cooperative model is that it enables its members to continue to live a rural life for most of the year, whilst maintaining a presence for their goods in an urban centre. This is made possible by the mutual support of all its members who take turns to make the trip from the coast to Anchorage.

Inupiat-Inuit [Seward, Alaska]

Despite the success of the Oomingmak programme, I was troubled by issues facing the Native People. They were worse than I had experienced anywhere else.
The link between native people, mental health and homelessness is a perturbing factor. Mortality from injuries whether self-inflicted or afflicted by others is 2-3 times the national average (Young and Chatwood, 2015:206).

By chance I met a man called Joe looking for a place to pitch his tent. I offered him a spot by my fire. Joe was half Inuit and half Inupiat.

'Full blown Alaska native', he declares. The rocky point recedes into the dark Alaskan fjord. A cold wind buffets the few flames. I ask him about the rife social problems that I witnessed in the city. 'Why would people choose a difficult homeless life in the city over their rural homes?' Joe's boisterous dial turns reflective. 'Anchorage and Fairbanks are like Las Vegas to them', he begins. A tale unfolds of of the Alaska Native youth; of fishing boats, of the illegal walrus trade, of prison and redemption.

—Diary entry, 14th May 2016, Seward

Alaska's native villages are isolated, oftentimes hundreds of miles by plane from the next cluster of dwellings. Family is everything, and the ways of the elders are strict. Many impose zero tolerance on alcohol within their territories. The youth grow up learning the traditional ways, but those ways are hard. The whole time they have exposure to the modern world. They have online

streaming, can order goods via e-commerce sites and regular postal planes come and go. On turning eighteen many decide to leave. When they do they are shunned by their community and often their family as well. They head to the big city. From a dry village suddenly alcohol is readily available. A multitude of bars and liquor stores. However, the emotions they have, the anxiety and depression, is still with them. These emotions are coupled with guilt for leaving their community and feelings of abandonment at being shunned. Having had no exposure to alcohol and due to their genetic makeup tolerance is low. Drunkenness comes quickly and alcoholism soon follows. They call home to ask their parents for help and are told to live with their decisions, that there will be no help from them. A great anger builds turning to recklessness and crime. Homelessness and other social problems follow. Many end up in prison. 'I know that', Joe says, 'because I, myself, have been to prison' (adapted from interview, Williams, 2016). Mental health issues have not only been documented among those living in the urban centres. Inuit hunters are experiencing the same due to an increasing inability to hunt due to changing ice conditions. The loss of the ice impacts them twice.

First, their decreased ability to provide food for their families, and secondly the loss of cultural identity that comes with these livelihood practices (Ford et al. 2014). Alaska has a fragile ecosystem that is vulnerable to change. The nature is vividly felt and all around, and the smallest changes impact upon the people.

—Diary entry, 14th May 2016, Seward

An eagle swoops down low, a small bird in its claws, it's wings beating heavily. So close I can feel the wind and see the sternness of its face. It snatches its prey without a regard for me or it. A whale breaches. I think it's a beluga. A froth of water and the smooth rolling mass of its vast back. A something of otters. A whisper maybe. Or a broil. I might call them a lava of otters. There movement is so smooth. They don't have blubber. Just a thick fur that they keep perpetually fluffed. The otters groom themselves in a gesture of vanity. Then lie on their back in the sea. Hands and feet in the air, nibbling at crustaceans. At night before sleep they wrap themselves in kelp. A way of staying rooted against the strong tidal pull of the ocean. I wonder, where is the kelp for Native People.

Learnings for the UK

Alaska was a contradiction. A vast expanse of land both harsh and beautiful, a wealth of resource inequitably shared, a people generous yet troubled. Maintaining my own sense of purpose was difficult against such a backdrop. It has taken some time to reflect upon my time there. But it is the resilience of communities to endure that has most stuck with me. The sense of community and unified spirit of the Oomingmak project sums this up. To preserve their traditional craft the members of their cooperative travel hundreds of miles to find buyers for their goods in the city. They live away from home for weeks at a time to manage the small shop and sell the wares for all the community. Back in Alaska's coastal villages the community support the families and take care of the homes of those that are away. Both the working model and the optimistic community spirit we would do well to adopt in the UK. Earlier I mentioned the rural-urban divide in UK fashion and the geographic spread. These distances are not so large when we look at those people are travelling in Alaska to sell their clothes.

CONCLUSION

Britain has a long and venerated tradition of clothing manufacturing. A tradition that spans the centuries with a living history today. A tradition that stretches geographically from the cold islands off Northern Scotland, to those in the channel below. Scotland is world famous for its tweed, Northamptonshire for shoemaking, Yorkshire for trousers, Leicester has its knitwear and hosiery, Bristol and Somerset has lingerie and bag making, Twickenham has shirtmakers whilst Sussex has costumiers, Wales produces tapestry wool cloth and blankets. We need to ensure a future for this industry, to preserve the skills of the master craftsmen and women so that they can pass them down to the next generation.

The following key findings would have a positive influence on the UK fashion and textiles industry:

—Recognise and build upon the value of cultural heritage by measuring it in our fashion and textiles industry and engendering a celebratory culture in wider British society.
—Create a unified response to the environmental cost of our fashion and textiles industry at enterprise and industry levels using digital technology.
—Encourage collaboration between the fashion and textiles industry, academia, government and/or NGOs. Such initiatives could support cultural heritage, the environment as well as vocational education so knowledge can be transferred to the next generation.
—There is case a for the geographical status of clothing, similar to the EU's instrument that protects agricultural products and foodstuffs. No such instrument exists in the UK or EU for clothing.

Tangible Cultural Heritage

An interesting regional measure of heritage is the Heritage Index of key sites in the UK. This has been created by the Royal Society of Arts in conjunction with the Heritage Lottery Fund. The purpose is to increase local identity, improve the well-being of residents and increase levels of tourism. It is made up of tangible heritage with areas rated for their historic built environment as well as parks, industrial heritage and museums (see RSA, 2016). An intangible heritage index could be created following the RSA model and building on data from companies' cultural heritage review. Were there a coordinated approach to recognise UK fashion's intangible cultural heritage then it would be easier for firms to estimate the added value to their company against a benchmark. It would also be easier for the UK government to estimate the added value to the sector and the 'made in UK' brand.

Intangible Cultural Heritage

It is difficult to measure the value of something intangible such as cultural heritage but it could be

brought into the business domain nonetheless. Brand value is similarly intangible and was once a marginal consideration in business. Today it is something that is universally recognised and can be accurately measured (it is recognised as the price paid for the business minus the value of the net assets of the business). A similar process of acceptance could occur with the value of cultural heritage. A step before calculation would be a review, adapting questions from the UN's Intangible Cultural Heritage nomination form (see ICH-01 2018:25). It would read something like this:

—What is the expression of cultural heritage?
—What is the social function and cultural meaning in the community?
—What are the characteristics of the practitioners and
—What are their roles?
—How are the knowledge and skills passed down?
—How does the community recognise it as their cultural heritage?
—How is the cultural heritage recreated in response to the environment, the interaction with nature and history?
—How does it provide the community with a sense of identity and continuity?

Environmental Cost

Despite its vibrant creativity the fashion industry has a problem. It is built on the smog-filled principles of 19th century industrialisation (Williams, 2016) and can no longer sustainably keep pace with consumer demands. In our thinking, by reconnecting the nature-culture diad we place humanity back into the environment, rather than believing we are extraneous from it (see Latour 2016: 282) . In our textiles economy, as the Ellen Macarthur Foundation (2017:26) suggest,

"Transforming the textiles industry into a circular economic model requires system-level change (and) unprecedented levels of collaboration and alignment."

Collaboration

Across the continents of North and South America successful initiatives are collaborative, diverse and evolving. The stakeholders are broad, but the vision shared. Funding streams are diverse, but do not serve as a crutch. The expertise is deep, but coming from a variety of places. Knowledge is coupled with learning, expertise with humility. Common denominators are collaboration, contextualisation and reflection. I witnessed this within initiatives in Chile and Bolivia. Collaborative success of this kind has also been found true in business. A study by Innovate UK (2013) found that involving two or more academic partners in business projects resulted in a gross value added (GVA) of £9.67 per pound spent, over twice that of projects conducted in isolation (in Dowling 2015). Fashion needs to work together.

Protected Geographical Status of Clothing

The EU currently provides protected status for many British foodstuffs and agricultural products, from Stilton cheese to Newcastle Ale. Shetland wool is the only textile in the list, falling under the agricultural products category. These fall under their Protected Designation of Origin and Protected Geographical Indication. There is a case to consider in greater detail whether the UK government should create an instrument for the protected geographical status of clothing and textiles. Doing so would recognise and enhance the value of Britain's cultural heritage.

Leadership and Empowerment

At the projects I worked with there were rarely equal partnerships, but each segment brought an expertise and shared a vision. This leadership does not necessarily come from one place. In Chile - government, in Bolivia - academia, in Ecuador - social enterprise, in Alaska - the community. On all the successful initiatives living cultures are empowered and given a voice. It is not always the literal voice that is heard the loudest. In Chile, Artesanias de Chile's Youtube channel can come across as superficial. Whereas in Bolivia's ASUR museum though the women weave in silence, they have helped design the mechanisms around them. UK fashion needs this alignment, but most importantly our makers' voices need to be heard. At home as abroad we can learn from fashion's oldest.

"*We are going to need more of this kind of thing.*"

Ed Milliband's (2016) response to my findings, particularly on the case for the protected geographical status and greater celebration of UK fashion making.

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