

Angela Karpouzi

Since I started planning my graduate collection I wanted to use ethically sourced fabrics to compliment a project that its concept had little to do with sustainability. I know from experience that, only now coming out of university, most of us look at fashion in an artistic, conceptual way rather than functional, so I wanted to show ethical thinking in a very 'normal' for us context, just by sourcing a different kind of fabrics while still creating outfits with contemporary fashion aesthetics in mind.

The main problem I see when people hear about sustainable fabrics, is that they believe there is very little variety and very high cost so they find it difficult find reasons to choose them, since most people prefer not to think about the environmental and social damage production of conventional fabrics can have. To help with this I wanted to create sample books of ethical fabrics for the use of all students and to be able to select fabrics for my own collection. I wanted to show not only the variety that can be found, but also the better in my opinion texture and feeling of those fabrics. Choosing this kind of fabrics based mostly on their quality will inevitably have its effect on tackling those environmental and social issues as well, so I believe it is a small step to the right direction.

Having been awarded the funding that made all this possible, I started contacting suppliers that I was already aware of but also started looking for new ones by taking part in web conferences and seminars, which was a great experience.

The result was a list of suppliers and fabric samples, from companies that sell many different kinds of fair trade, organic and recycled materials to some that specialize in certain ones such as lace or peace silks. The list is Europe-based, thinking that this will make delivery times shorter so people would be more likely to place orders. I came to see that Germany has an already advanced market for this kind of materials, but in the UK it is also growing. Another realisation was that all the people I contacted were very happy to help with what I was trying to do, some even offering discounts, and all just very willing to contribute in any way possible to this change in the industry. Unfortunately I am not aware of many people that have noticed the samples yet, but the ones that have were very surprised with what they could find, especially with the quality and textures.

For my collection I decided to work with fabrics from organic natural fibres such as cotton and linen so that at the end of their lives the materials would be biodegradable. Even though in the beginning I was also considering silk, that was considerably more expensive especially in peace quality that I would have chosen as there would have been no mistreat of silkworms, so I opted for plant fibres only. I was hoping that all my samples would also be made from the same materials but unfortunately that was too costly, I did however try to use the conventional calico as efficiently as possible, for instance by cutting and reusing fabric from samples that did not work, another way sustainability can be incorporated. Even though I was aiming for a collection 100% organic, timing and deadlines made it impossible; I had to use conventional cotton thread for the making of all garments and one conventional cotton trim. The rest of my trims were created using the fabrics left after cutting my patterns.

In total, I found the variety of fabrics suitable for my project very satisfying and I believe that was also evident to my peers and tutors.

If there was more time for me to work on this project I would have definitely sourced all trims and sewing accessories in sustainable qualities, and I would have experimented more with cutting techniques to minimize the textile waste produced as my initial plan was, but again because of timing it was not possible.

It seems that the decision to use organic fabrics will have little to no positive impact on my final grade, but grades were not in my mind when choosing to do this. I feel I came to prove the point I wanted, and I am very pleased with the collection I have created. I still believe that having fabric samples in our studio, a list of suppliers available for anyone interested and an example of a fashion collection made from ethical fabrics, changes are more likely to happen.

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