

HORIZON  
2020

# Fashion's Responsible Supply Chain Hub (FReSCH): Investigating a just transition to a low-carbon circular fashion industry

## Berichterstattung

### Projektinformationen

#### FReSCH

ID Finanzhilfevereinbarung: 895711

[Projektwebsite](#) 

#### DOI

[10.3030/895711](https://doi.org/10.3030/895711) 

Projekt abgeschlossen

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UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN,  
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IRELAND, DUBLIN



Ireland

## Periodic Reporting for period 1 - FReSCH (Fashion's Responsible Supply Chain Hub (FReSCH): Investigating a just transition to a low-carbon circular fashion industry)

Berichtszeitraum: 2021-01-04 bis 2023-01-03

## Zusammenfassung vom Kontext und den Gesamtzielen des Projekts



The fashion industry accounts for approximately 10% of all global carbon emissions. The industry is taking steps to transition to a low-carbon circular system, however, it is difficult as fashion has long, dispersed, fragmented supply chains and is notoriously secretive. Even though many companies claim to focus on sustainability, their focus is on waste, pollution and environmental issues, with social issues relatively ignored. Geographical distance between buyers and suppliers and imbalanced power relations prevent the transition to environmentally and socially sustainable supply chains. Environmental sustainability practices can and are used at the expense of social sustainability and there are trade-offs not only between business goals and sustainability but also between environmental and social sustainability practices.

The majority of existing supply chain practices and research has pursued an instrumental logic and put economic benefits before environmental and social interests. Trade-offs exist between environmental and social sustainability practices, with little known about the social outcomes of environmental sustainability demands by companies. Economic pressure and power disparities in the supply chain have led to multiple scandals and issues. Problems often occur at supply chain stages far removed from the brand-name company and are therefore difficult to predict or eliminate. Until now, concepts of justice and the relationship between justice, resources and behaviour have been ignored. Environmental demands need a parallel focus on justice and fairness. It is challenging to make systemic changes within an industry characterised by mistrust, exclusivity and that places economic benefits ahead of environmental and social interests; fortunately, due to the scale of the industry and that women are the majority of fashion workers, these challenges also present significant opportunities for economic, social and environmental development.

Fashion's Responsible Supply Chain Hub (FReSCH) takes an interdisciplinary approach to these challenges and explores how environmental practice implementation can also ensure social and economic justice in complex fashion supply chains. Existing research is primarily limited to survey and case-study methods, which are insufficient for understanding the complexity of sustainability in supply chain management. By responding to the need to extend beyond the single firm/brand and their first tier suppliers, FReSCH moves theory, method, practice and policy forward by investigating the complex trade-offs, tensions and opportunities between economic, social and environmental practices and outcomes across supply chain levels. In order to ensure that the transition to a low-carbon circular economy happens in a fairer and more inclusive way, FReSCH focuses on justice, ethics of sustainability transitions, tensions, opportunities and unintended, unplanned or unforeseen outcomes of sustainability. As a just transition can only happen by including people at all supply chain levels, this project includes companies and workers at multiple stages in the supply chain. In addition, FReSCH responds to the call for research into sustainability practices of SMEs, and how and why SMEs pursue sustainability practices and goals.

## Arbeit, die ab Beginn des Projekts bis zum Ende des durch den Bericht erfassten Berichtszeitraums geleistet wurde, und die



## wichtigsten bis dahin erzielten Ergebnisse

FReSCH used a systematic literature analysis, a technique from the general management discipline; and the action research approach, from the organizational behaviour field, to investigate appropriate mechanisms for a just transition to a low-carbon circular fashion industry. Using a novel methodological approach incorporating simultaneous action research at multiple supply chain levels, it was undertaken through direct engagement and cooperation with a brand company (Fast Fashion Giant 1 (FFG1)) and approximately twenty supplier and sub-supplier companies in Turkey. The research team incorporated managers and workers and observed them concurrently at multiple organisations across multiple tiers.

The research team first assessed FFG1's supply chain in Turkey according to their externally disclosed supplier lists. The research team then selected a sample of tier-1 suppliers that were considered as strategically important based on the product type (woven garments and jersey), size and sustainability record. The research team subsequently collaborated with six tier-1 finished garment manufacturers located in the main production regions in Turkey and the research team had access to their managers and workers over an extended period. After research with tier-1 finished garment manufacturers, the research team engaged 13 lower-tier suppliers (fabric producers, yarn manufacturers and service providers such as printing, embroidery and dyeing that were linked with tier-1 suppliers). All these tier-2 and tier-3 (lower-tier) suppliers deliver fundamental services for the garments.

FReSCH shows that a transition to a low-carbon fashion industry is impeded by overproduction. This emerges as the fundamental problem that no fashion giant aims to be tackling. We uncover that in the pursuit of reducing carbon footprint, fast-fashion giants collaborate with elitist industrial associations and they create top-down governance tools, which lead to severe social and environmental problems across fashion supply chains with paradoxical demands and tensions. These demands are then cascaded onto the people working across multiple tiers in these supply chains. The commitments, objectives and tools endorsed by the fashion giants do not include workers. The fashion industry suffers from imbalanced power relations and lack of representation, whilst the psychological as well as physiological consequences of overproduction on the workers are systematically ignored. These are the issues impeding a just transition to a low-carbon fashion industry.

The fashion industry is now using the term 'just fashion transition'. A number of fashion companies claim to be taking steps to transition to a low-carbon system in just ways. Nevertheless, our scientific research shows that this is not happening and that just transition is at risk of being hijacked by elitist industry players that aim to pursue business interests at the expense of people and planet. FReSCH defines just transition, in the context of fashion, as inclusive, holistic, and equitable actions led by people and communities to disrupt and transform market-based, capitalist systems that perpetuate social and environmental problems.

**Fortschritte, die über den aktuellen Stand der Technik hinausgehen und voraussichtliche potenzielle Auswirkungen**



## (einschließlich der bis dato erzielten sozioökonomischen Auswirkungen und weiter gefassten gesellschaftlichen Auswirkungen des Projekts)

FReSCH understands the optimal strategies for a just, fair and inclusive transition to an environmentally friendly circular fashion industry. By using a newly developed methodology, simultaneous multi-level action research, this project takes a top-down and bottom-up approach by examining a fashion supply chain in transition focusing on a brand company, its suppliers and sub-suppliers in production countries where there are complex economic, environmental and social issues. This project looks for ways to enable worker self-determination in order to solve problems in unique context-specific and customised ways.



Fashion supply chains

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