

We have an emergency, we need to slow down:

social innovations and degrowth towards a sustainable fashion sector

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Abstract

Led by the growth paradigm, the fashion sector finds itself in patterns of overproduction and overconsumption putting immense pressure on socio-ecological systems. To tackle this current system, the degrowth movement emerges as a plausible solution. In this thesis, we aim at getting an empirically based understanding of social innovations' strategies of change, in the fashion sector, in order to enable socio-cultural change in line with degrowth. To do so, we conduct a multi-case study of four social innovations in the fashion sector. Our results show that these social innovations aim at promoting new fashion values, norms and practices. Additionally, the result from our key informant interviews reveal that social innovations navigate institutional environment that can either enable or hinder their operations. We conclude that the degrowth transition's future success is highly dependent on improving institutional environments to allow socio-cultural change and challenge the entrenched mindsets spearheaded by the growth logic.

Keywords: Degrowth, Socio-cultural change, Social Innovation, Sustainable Fashion, Fashion Practice, Values

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List of abbreviations

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises

1 Introduction

1.1 Growth and degrowth in the fashion sector

The fashion sector has become one of the most globalised industries in the world, influencing people's values, norms, beliefs, practices, identities and culture. Clothing consumption has increased drastically in the European Union since the year 2000, making the fashion sector the fourth-highest pressure sector for the use of primary raw materials, following the food, housing and transport sectors (European Environment Agency, 2019; Vladimirova, 2021). Europeans are consuming fashion more than ever before, without spending more money, due to fast fashion business models that promote overconsumption, succeeding by exploiting human and natural resources (European Environment Agency, 2019). This results in a tremendous waste, both pre and post-consumer. It is estimated that an average European citizen consumes approximately 26kg of textile per year while discarding 11kg of textile per year (European Environment Agency, 2019). Additionally, in 2021, the fashion sector was responsible for emitting 2.1 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent, accounting for 4% of global annual carbon emissions (McKinsey, 2022).

In line with the growth paradigm, technical innovations often come as an easy answer to those environmental issues, yet fail to understand the central role of socio-cultural change in implementing sustainable transitions. Degrowth arguments have settled ground in mainstream fashion debates, arguing for a socio-cultural change in the fashion sector to combat the socio-ecological issues of overproduction and overconsumption (see examples in Appendix A). Building on the arguments of degrowth, these discussions challenge the current notion of economic growth, which has shaped and influenced today's unsustainable fashion practices, and suggest a re-focus on growth-alternative economic models, also referred to as wellbeing economies (Sharpe et al., 2022). However, degrowth is commonly discussed as utopian in these debates (see Appendix A) and limited research has been done to understand how a degrowth transition can materialise within the existing capitalist system (Vandeventer et al, 2019). Therefore, in this thesis, we seek an empirical understanding of the strategies of change that social innovations in the fashion sector currently are championing on their journey towards degrowth.

1.2 Thesis aim and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to get an empirically based understanding of social innovations' strategies of change, in the fashion sector, in order to enable socio-cultural change in line with degrowth. To do so, we have conducted a multi-case study of four social innovations in the fashion sector: F/ACT Movement, Popswap, Fashion Revolution and Small but Perfect. By investigating such social innovations that "change social practices and/or structures" (Rueede & Lurtz, 2012), our study will examine and exemplify the strategies of change used to enable socio-cultural change in line with degrowth, within the fashion sector, through a shift in fashion values, norms and/or practices.

1.2.1 Research questions

Our thesis aims at answering the following overarching research question:

- How can social innovations in the fashion sector contribute to a socio-cultural change towards degrowth?

To answer such a question, our thesis is guided by two sub research questions:

1. What strategies of change are the social innovations F/ACT Movement, Popswap, Fashion Revolution and Small but Perfect using to promote fashion values, norms and/or practices in line with degrowth?
2. How can the institutional environment enable or hinder the social innovations F/ACT Movement, Popswap, Fashion Revolution and Small but Perfect to lead socio-cultural change in line with degrowth?

To answer those two questions, we draw on two strategies for data generation. The first one is a content analysis of websites and social media posts, mostly Instagram accounts, to understand the communication of change strategies for each of those social innovations. The second one is a thematic analysis of key informant interviews with founders (in the case of F/ACT Movement and Popswap) or primary decision-makers (in the case of Fashion Revolution and Small But Perfect) to get more insights into the institutional environment and the challenges and opportunities they encounter to promote new fashion values, norms and/or practices.

1.2.2 Thesis structure

To answer this overarching research question, we first start by presenting the context of our research, in regard to the fashion sector and sustainability. Secondly, we present the concept of degrowth in the fashion system, through the earth logic research action plan and the interdisciplinary perspective of fashion studies. We also present our second key concept: socio-cultural change; through the lens of integral theory and social innovation theory. Thirdly, we present the multi-case methodology, while introducing our four social innovations and how they challenge the conventional fashion system. We then explain our process of collecting, sorting and analysing data for both our content analysis of social media and websites, as well as our thematic analysis of key informant interviews. Finally, we present the results and analysis of our data generation, to then discuss our findings against the background of previous research from both the fashion and the degrowth research field.

2 Setting the scene

2.1 Conventional fashion practices of overproduction and overconsumption

Today's conventional fashion practices are rooted in the growth paradigm that pushes production and consumption beyond socio-ecological boundaries. This has resulted in patterns of overproduction in the fashion sector that rely strongly on natural resources extraction and labour exploitation that are far from sustainable (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019). On the aggregate scale, production rates between 2000 and 2014 suggest that the number of garments doubled, reaching 100 billion garments produced globally in 2014 (Ertekin & Atik, 2020). At the same time, it is estimated that clothing consumption accounts for 2% to 10% of the environmental impact of EU consumption (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019). This clothing consumption is promoted by the fashion sector through models of planned obsolescence that push customers to buy continuously to satisfy economic growth, regardless of the socio-ecological costs (Law et al., 2004).

2.2 New fashion practices: from technological innovations to socio-cultural changes

Nowadays, some actors in the fashion sector are becoming aware of the alarming socio-ecological impacts of their conventional practices, and therefore willing to engage in voluntary efforts to reduce those impacts. Such voluntary efforts are often translated into the adoption of new fashion practices as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). CSR rely largely on technological innovations, such as material recycling, renewable energy or other technology enabling more efficient processes, in the hope of continuing the manufacturing of new products, satisfying the economic growth, but with a lower impact on socio-ecological systems (Brooks et al., 2017; European Environment Agency, 2019). In other words, technological innovations adopted by actors in the fashion sector have become predominant solutions to lower impact on socio-ecological systems, as they portray new opportunities for profit-making (Brooks et al., 2017). Similarly, many actors in the fashion sector adopt practices belonging to the circular economy to reduce their dependencies on resource extraction (Brooks et al., 2017). However, opponents argue that technical innovations, introduced as part of CSR or circular practices, fail to acknowledge the socio-cultural and systematic challenges linked to overproduction and overconsumption, arguing that practices of (over)consumption of clothes are central to modern life's norms and values (Brooks et al., 2017). In fact, in capitalist societies, fashion consumption has become synonymous with identity creation, where we have been accustomed to the belief that we can

distinguish ourselves from the collective, by creating a unique personality type (Brooks et al., 2017; Samuel & Ko, 2019). In order to constantly renew and foster these unique personality types, we, as individuals, are forced into a system of following new trends and (over)consumption, to avoid social exclusion and/or to approach our reference groups (Aspers & Godart, 2013). Fashioning our bodies is a deeply rooted socio-cultural phenomenon often used in marketing strategies to push for overconsumption and associated overproduction of clothes. Therefore, it becomes clear that solely focusing on technological innovations limits the scale of change to reduce socio-ecological impacts associated with conventional fashion practices (Nesterova, 2021). In contrast, proponents of the degrowth transition promote a growth-alternative economic model, by focusing on wellbeing rather than economic growth, thereby challenging fashion's capitalist structure.

2.3 The degrowth transition

Despite suggesting a growth-alternative economic model, it is important to reiterate that the degrowth transition does not have the goal to reduce Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Kallis et al., 2018). While it remains a possible outcome, the degrowth transition's main aim is to set a new culture and systems based on well-being with environmental sustainability at the forefront (Kallis et al., 2018). The degrowth transition defies the system built on economic growth and its dominant objective of pursuing growth at any costs, through overproduction and overconsumption (Kallis et al., 2018). Such a transition has repercussions on cultural, social and political spheres in our societies (Kallis et al., 2018). For instance, although planned degrowth transition is not strongly advocated within political spheres, due to conflict of interest and power relations within the current economic system, a degrowth transition has the potential to contribute to a broader change among "radical social experiments that embody and anticipates degrowth utopias" (Kallis et al., 2018 p. 308).

2.4 Social innovation for degrowth

Advocating for social innovations, rather than technological innovations, ensures a sustainable transition, like degrowth, consider as its roots in socio-cultural change. While in theory, a degrowth transition might seem like an easy endeavour of reducing overproduction and overconsumption, in practice degrowth transitions are limited or implemented at small scales at best. Delving into social innovation theory allows us to identify the institutional environment, or more specifically the opportunities and challenges when engaging in new practices defying the growth paradigm in the fashion sector. Understanding the

role and influence of the institutional environment is crucial to social innovations' development and success (Cajaiba-Santana, 2013). Social innovations may challenge the capitalist ideology and conventional fashion practices of overproduction and overconsumption, thereby advocating for a sustainability transition very similar to the degrowth transition. Indeed, in line with degrowth, social innovations seek to radically change social and cultural practices and/or structures (Rueede & Lurtz, 2012).

2.5 Today's implementation of the degrowth transition in the fashion sector

Changing social and cultural practices reveals itself to be extremely challenging, yet crucial to ensure a sustainable transition, like degrowth. In 2019, Fletcher & Tham developed the concept of the earth logic to provide a critical research action plan that attempts to remedy and transform the fashion industry by addressing the systemic challenges associated with the growth logic. The earth logic research action plan is essential in demonstrating a degrowth transition that can be implemented in the fashion sector, and how it should be approached. As such, the earth logic research action plan takes a central role in this thesis. Later, in March 2022, within the process of writing this thesis, *Wellbeing Wardrobe: A wellbeing economy for the fashion and textile sector* by Sharpe et al. (2022) was published. This academic report prepared for the European Environmental Bureau defines the growth paradigm and its associated mindsets, as not sustainable (Sharpe et al., 2022). Instead, it advocates for growth-alternatives economic models, including the degrowth transition. Finally, this report depicts the poor changes achieved by initiatives following a green growth or ecomodernist approach, considering the state of the urgency (Sharpe et al., 2022). All in all, *Wellbeing Wardrobe: A wellbeing economy for the fashion and textile sector* is just one of the most recent examples of many other academic works denouncing the growth paradigm as a threat to sustainability. While growth-alternatives economic models are attracting more researchers in sustainability science, to this date, none explain the strategies of change needed to enable a socio-cultural change, looking at both inner and outer dimensions, in line with the degrowth transition in the fashion sector. This is how this present thesis contributes to sustainability science.

3 Theory

3.1 Degrowth in the Fashion System

3.1.1 The fashion system: an institutionalised socio-cultural phenomenon

We approach the concept of fashion in accordance with the interdisciplinary perspective of Fashion Studies. Following this field of study, Kawamura (2005) makes a distinction between fashion as materiality and fashion as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Her sociological investigation of fashion thus explains the fashion system as a system of institutions that produces the phenomenon/practice of fashion (Kawamura, 2005). Consequently, fashion reflects the institutionalised system, that is shaped by various actors that collectively produce and uphold fashion and fashion culture (Kawamura, 2005). The process of trends in the fashion system, first introduced by the designers in big fashion capitals during fashion weeks, later legitimised further by fashion journalists, and finally adopted by the masses, shows an example of how the fashion culture is collectively produced (Kawamura, 2005). On the basis of Kawamura's research, we recall the environmental problem of overproduction and overconsumption of clothes to fashion's materiality, whilst the socio-cultural underpinnings of such practice can be discussed in relation to the concept of the fashion system. Therefore, the fashion system provides a pre-understanding of how its institutional system functions, giving us a better understanding of how social innovation in the fashion sector can disrupt such a system by posing socio-cultural change.

3.1.2 The earth logic research action plan

The earth logic research action plan, developed by Fletcher & Tham (2019) aims at recreating the fashion system following an earth logic, rather than a growth logic. While the earth logic does not explicitly refer to degrowth per se, it has very similar ambitions of putting first the earth and the health of its inhabitant before economic growth (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). Throughout this thesis, we use the earth logic research action plan as an analogy of degrowth in the fashion industry. The earth logic research action plan goes far beyond the concepts of circularity and/or technological innovations, which is often glorified in the fashion industry, despite sustaining the growth logic (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). As much as the degrowth transition may sound radical and difficult to implement, the earth logic research action plan decorticates the definition of such a transition into practical actions, grouped under six earth landscapes

(Less, Local, Plural, Learning, Language, and Governance). For instance, the Less landscape, advocates, among other concepts, for forms of downsizing that can be easily translated into practices of consuming less. Altogether the six earth landscapes work holistically to rebalance power while enabling new perspectives for sustainability (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). This means that these six earth landscapes act as pathways for different types of collaborations and actions within the fashion sector, while supporting each other (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). This also means that actors willing to engage with the earth logic need to work consistently with all six earth landscapes and cannot solely opt-in for one of the landscapes. By using the earth logic research action plan as a framework for degrowth, we believe it provides us with coherent points of study applied to the fashion sector.

3.2 Socio-cultural Change

Socio-cultural change as part of the degrowth transition is central to this thesis. We approach socio-cultural change by delving into two theories: the integral theory and the social innovation theory. The integral theory informs our investigation by studying the role of both inner dimensions (values and norms) and outer dimensions (practices) in implementing socio-cultural change, and to a broader extent a degrowth transition. Social innovation theory allows us to complement the integral theory, namely by taking an individualistic approach to the social innovations' strategies of change, and to understand the role of the institutional environment in implementing degrowth as a sustainability transition.

3.2.1 Integral theory and socio-cultural change for a degrowth transition

As a theoretical entry point to understand socio-cultural change at multiple levels, we follow the integral theory, also referred to as AQAL (All Quadrants All Levels), originally developed by Ken Wilber (1997) and later adapted to climate adaptation by O'Brien & Hochachka (2010). The integral theory is a concept that is used to enact transitions, such as the degrowth transition, holistically and comprehensively, looking into both outer and inner transformation at an individual and collective level. Hence, the integral theory is often presented and summarised in a form of four quadrants (Figure 1). While O'Brien & Hochachka (2010) refers to those four quadrants as four types of adaptations for climate change, we refer to them as four types of changes enabling a degrowth transition in the fashion sector (Figure 1). By referring to

the integral theory, we want to understand how inner and outer dimensions both play a central and complementary role in fostering socio-cultural change and consequently shaping new fashion norms, values and practices, in line with the degrowth transition. It is important to note that while this framework has strongly influenced our analysis in investigating fashion values, norms and practices, we do not apply it entirely, as we disregard the individuals and collective dimensions throughout our analysis, focusing solely on the inner and outer dimensions of a transition like degrowth.

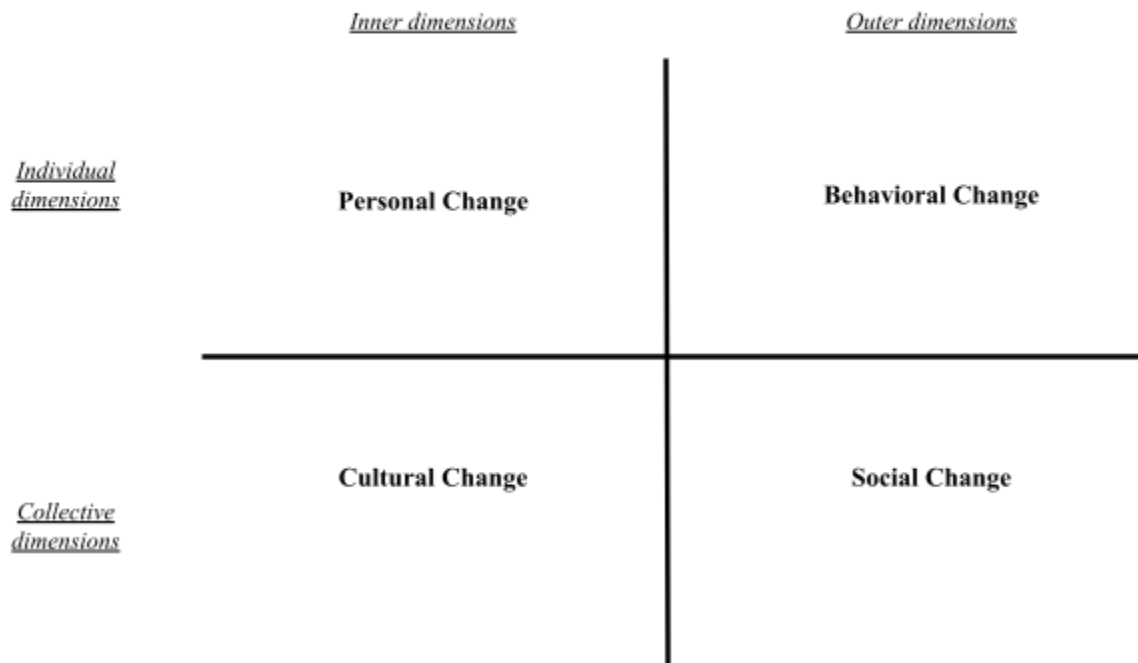


Figure 1: The integral theory

The integral theory is a concept originally proposed by Ken Wilber (1997) and later adapted to climate change adaptation by O'Brien & Hochachka (2010). Its main objective is to act as a metatheory to emphasise the role of each quadrant in a successful transition.

Source: Own illustration adapted from O'Brien & Hochachka (2010)

Recently, sustainability science scholars have explained the inner dimensions of people to be a powerful capacity for socio-cultural change towards sustainability. Thus its importance in the research field is introduced as such:

The vast majority of sustainability science has focused on the external world of ecosystems, economic markets, social structures and governance dynamics [outer dimensions]. In doing so, a critical second

dimension of reality has been neglected: the inner lives of individuals. [inner dimensions] (writing in parenthesis are our own, Ives et al., 2020, p208)

We align with such a statement, emphasising that inner dimensions cannot be overlooked to enable a degrowth transition. Hence, the integral theory provides us with relevant entry points to ensure inner and outer dimensions are equally considered in our four cases to enable a degrowth transition. Moreover, Woiwode et al. (2021) emphasise that inner dimensions such as the goals, values, worldviews and emotions of people have been recognised as deep leverage points. Despite being difficult to activate, we propose that inner dimensions have a strong transformative potential for socio-cultural change and to a broader extent, the degrowth transition (Woiwode et al., 2021). Although the integral theory facilitates a holistic approach to transitions, it also presents limitations specifically in depicting clearly the transition process required to enact socio-cultural change at different scales (Riddell, 2013). To bridge such a gap, the theoretical concept of social innovation presents itself as a complementary concept investigating the role of the institutional environment on socio-cultural change (Riddell, 2013).

3.2.2 Social innovation theory and the role of the institutional environment in socio-cultural change

For this thesis, we use social innovation theory to complement integral theory. Indeed, social innovation theory resonates and enriches integral theory and its four quadrants as social innovation theory places a strong emphasis on the institutional environment and how it can affect socio-cultural change (Cajaiba-Santana, 2013; Mulgan, 2006). Therefore, we echo Mulgan (2006) “social innovation is much more likely to happen when the right background conditions are present” (p.155), as we seek to understand such conditions faced by our four cases.

While numerous definitions of the concept of social innovation have been proposed, we draw on Rueede & Lurtz (2012) who define social innovations as innovations that “change social practices and/or structures” (p.13). Such a definition allows us to investigate the social practices and structures that are being promoted and enabled by the cases within our study. Furthermore, an emphasis is put on the structural perspective of social innovation theory, in order to investigate the complexity of socio-cultural and politico-economic conditions or in other words the institutional environment. Undeniably, the institutional environment might hinder or enable the cases’ ability in promoting a socio-cultural change

through their operations and/or creation of new fashion norms, values and practices. As such, we take a theoretical stance within the social innovation research field, which traditionally has created an actor-structure dichotomy between the agentic centred perspective (e.g. institutional entrepreneurship) and the structuralist perspectives (e.g. institutional environment). Although this actor-structure dichotomy has been questioned and scholars like Cajasanta's (2014) have proposed frameworks to combine the two perspectives, we believe the structuralist perspective is a better entry point to understand how to best support these social innovations in their quest to challenge the conventional fashion system.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research design

As we have unpacked the theory that will be used in this thesis, we now looked at the methodology following a specific research design, as illustrated in Figure 2. Following choosing relevant theories, we were able to draft a research question and simultaneously pick four relevant cases in the fashion system to answer such a qualitative research question. Once the case selected, we generated qualitative data, later analysed. The data analysis consisted of firstly, coding and sorting the data generated, secondly, analysing it to elicit theory, and thirdly interpreting and discussing our findings alongside the theory.

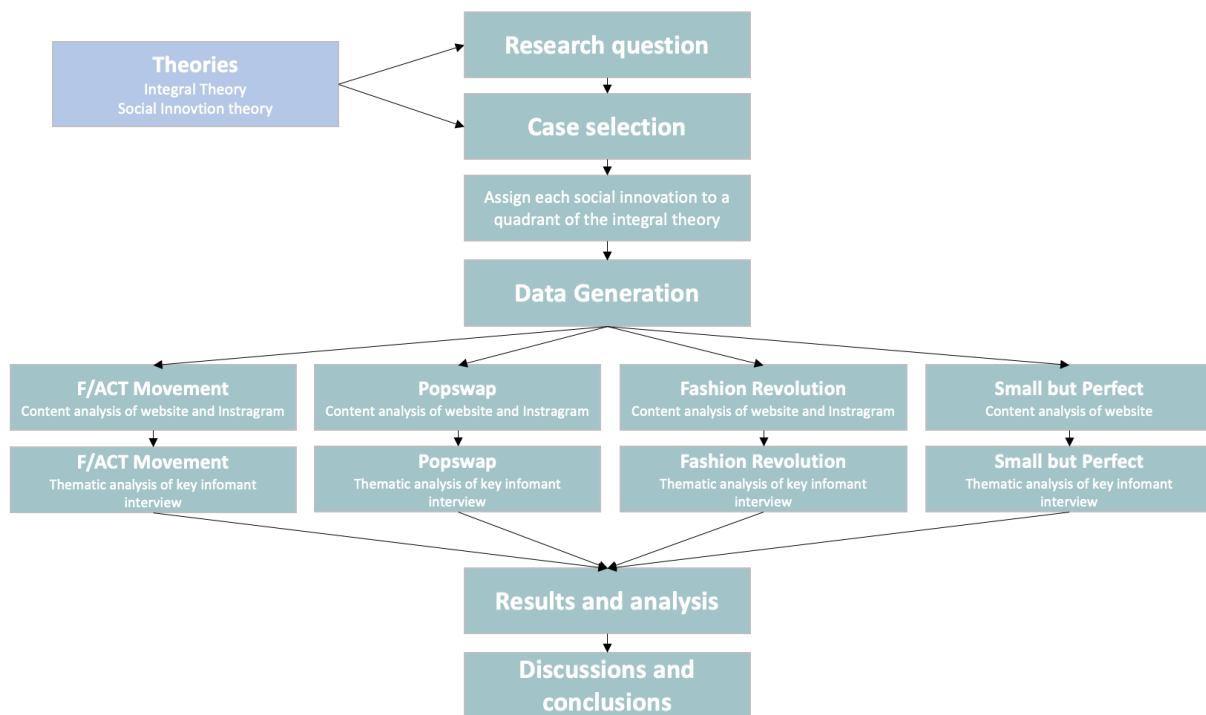


Figure 2: Research design

This figure represent our research design. The box in light blue represents the theories on which we base our research, explained in Section 3. The boxes in turquoise represents our methodology explained in further details in the present section, Section 4.

Source: Own illustration

In the following sub-sections, we inform the choice of doing a multi-case study and introduce our four cases. Thereafter, we share detailed descriptions of our data generation and analysis, to then end this methodology section by discussing its limitations.

4.2 Multi-case study methodology

For our research, the multi-case study methodology is particularly useful in our research as it focuses on a contemporary debate (Benbasat et al., 1987). Such a method allows us to understand the complexity of concepts like the degrowth transition in depth rather than breadth, by answering questions of “how” and “why” actors in the fashion sector aim at operating socio-cultural change, in line with the degrowth transition. (Benbasat et al., 1987; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Additionally, Andrade (2009) and Flyvbjerg (2006) underpin that, case studies are ideal for generalising and learning, and strengthening social sciences. In our present thesis, we are investigating cases of four social innovations in the fashion sector promoting socio-cultural change, in line with the degrowth transition. The choice of studying four cases of social innovations allows for seeing both similarities and differences between the cases, acquiring a more holistic and systematic understanding of their strategies of change. That is why we believe a multi-case study is a well-suited methodology, in reaching our thesis aim of getting an empirically based understanding of social innovations’ strategies of change, in the fashion sector, in order to enable socio-cultural change in line with degrowth.

As mentioned previously, the case selection has been guided by the integral theory and its later adaptation to climate adaption by O’Brien & Hochachka (2010). To ensure our thesis took a holistic stance in line with the integral theory, we identified one case per quadrant, hence the number of four cases. The four cases have each been assigned to one quadrant of the integral theory as followed (Figure 3):

- F/ACT Movement (Personal change - inner/individual),
- Popswap (Behavioural change - outer/individual),
- Fashion Revolution (Cultural change - inner/collective) and
- Small but Perfect (Social change - outer/collective).

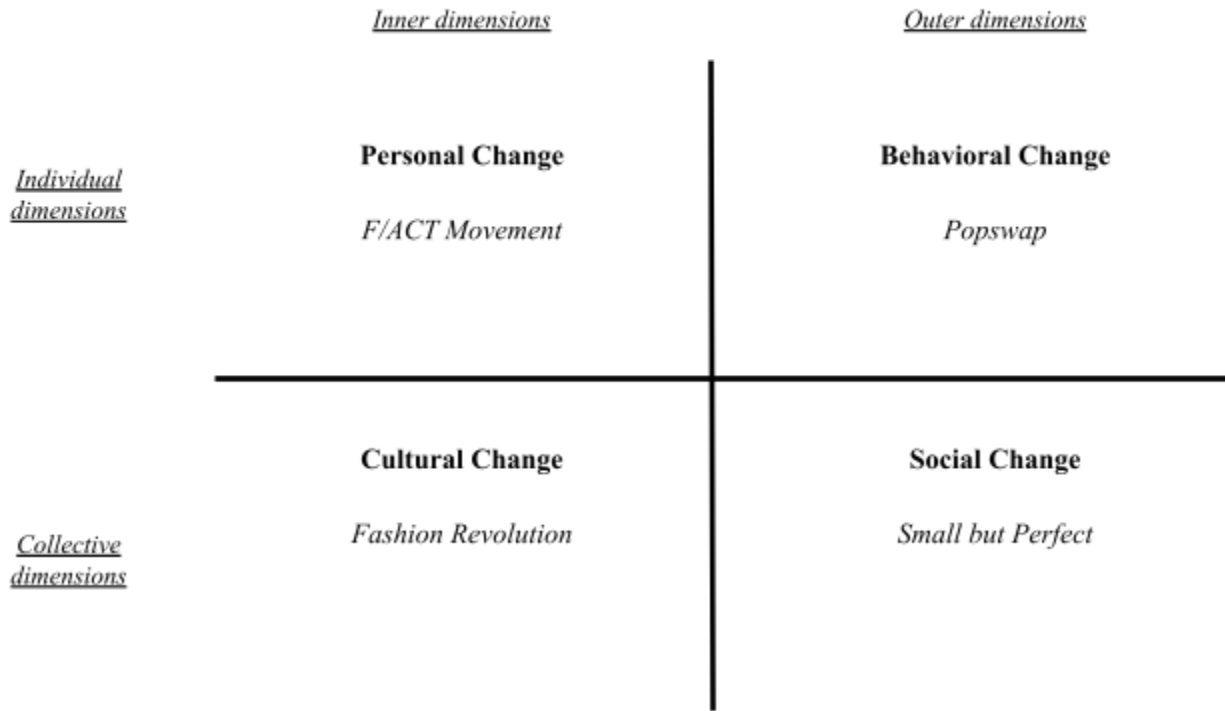


Figure 3: F/ACT movement, Popswap, Fashion Revolution and Small but Perfect in the integral theory

This figure represents the four social innovations selected and framed based on the integral theory.

Source: Own illustration adapted from O’Brien & Hochachka (2010)

It is important to note that the classification of each case into a quadrant, as per Figure 3, is solely based on our own interpretation of their practices in facilitating socio-cultural change in the fashion sector. While we originally attributed one social innovation to one quadrant of the integral theory, we quickly realised, when analysing the data, that the reality of it is much more complex and that all social innovations often interact with all four quadrants at different levels. Since we also investigate socio-cultural change at the system level, we decided to disregard the individual dimensions presented in the integral theory. That is why throughout our results and discussions, we solely refer to inner dimensions and outer dimensions, the former representing inner-collective i.e. cultural change and the latter representing outer-collective i.e. social change. As such, we introduce each case in the following sections to explain what practices they engage in and why we have assigned them to the selected quadrants (Figure 3).

4.2.1 F/ACT Movement

This case is a collaboration between (Swedish) municipalities to “inspire consumers to make more sustainable fashion choices and to use what is already in their wardrobe”(F/ACT Movement, 2022a). F/ACT movement shares stories of those individuals, mainly via social media, explaining what practices they have changed, how they did it and how they feel about it. F/ACT movement relies on their local ambassadors “f/activists” – which share inspiration on how they themselves make a sustainable wardrobes. As a collaboration trying to relate to the values and norms (inner dimensions) of individuals, we originally believed that this social innovation represents the best personal change.

4.2.2 Popswap

This case is a Swedish business that has developed an app to promote and facilitate clothes swapping. Hence, it aims at reducing fashion overproduction and overconsumption or in their own words “remake fashion” through “swipe, match and swap” (Popswap, 2022). As a new business trying to change practices (outer dimensions) of individuals, we originally believed that this social innovation represents the best behavioural change.

4.2.3 Fashion Revolution

This case is a leading global social movement of change-maker within the fashion sector, advocating for more responsible practices at all levels within the fashion system. Fashion Revolution mobilised a diverse collective, with the vision of “A global fashion industry that conserves and restores the environment and values, people, over growth and profit.” (Fashion Revolution, 2022e). As a social movement trying to change values and norms (inner dimensions) of the collective, we originally believed that this social innovation represents the best cultural change.

4.2.4 *Small but Perfect*

This case is an accelerator developed by the European Union that supports Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the fashion sector to transition to more sustainable business models. Small but Perfect emphasises the role of SMEs to play in a sustainable transition in which “enterprises should be integrated into a wider system that truly puts people and planet before profit.” (Small but Perfect, 2022). As a business accelerator trying to change practices (outer dimensions) of the collective, we originally believed that this social innovation represents the best social change.

4.3 Data generation and analysis

In this thesis, we generate data from two different qualitative collection methods and take an interpretative approach in the data analysis. The first one is a content analysis of website and Instagram accounts for each of our four cases. The second one is a thematic analysis of key informant interviews with the founder (in the case of F/ACT movement and Popswap) or a representative (in the case of Fashion Revolution and Small but Perfect) of our four cases.

4.3.1 *Content analysis of the websites and Instagram accounts*

Content analysis is a predominant methodology used in social sciences to sift through large data sets in a systematic, and qualitative way to identify and describe individual, collective, social or institutional change (Prasad, 2008; Stemler, 2000; Weber, 1990). As Prasad (2008) mentions, the main objective of using a content analysis is to understand “WHO says WHAT to WHOM with WHAT EFFECT?”. In other words, what strategies of change do social innovation communicate and how do they enable socio-cultural change in line with the degrowth transition? As a starting point for each of our four cases, we identified two sources of publicly available information, namely their own websites and their own Instagram accounts. As we are investigating their own strategies of change, it is important to solely generate data from their own sources, rather than third parties. For F/Act Movement, Fashion Revolution and Popswap, we first generated data from their respective Instagram accounts: @fact.movement,

@fash_rev & @popswap.app. We, then, extracted further data from their websites. Finally, regarding Small but Perfect, it is important to note that they do not own an Instagram account. Therefore, the data generated for this case predominantly came from their own website, as well as Instagram posts sharing their actions, but published by some of their main partners, like Fashion Revolution.

To ensure the description is the most reliable and consistent, we established a set of coding categories for the data collected through the content analysis of websites and Instagram accounts. In this thesis, we use the earth logic research action plan as a framework to structure our coding categories and therefore our data generation and analysis. While the earth logic research action plan presents six landscapes (Less, Local, Plural, Learning, Language, and Governance), we solely focus on three landscapes related to fashion activities: the Less landscape, the Local landscape and the Plural landscape (Table 1). We disregard the Learning landscape, the Language landscape and the Governance landscape, as their role is to create, maintain and evaluate the earth logic (Fletcher & Tham, 2019), and are therefore beyond the scope of this thesis. The former three landscapes (Less, Local and Plural) allowed us to categorise the data collected and generate insights around three values: sufficiency, companionship and diversity; and associated fashion practices. For each landscape, we then identified three to four subcategories to classify the content collected in a more specific manner and give insights on the kinds of fashion practices investigated under the landscape of Less, Local and Plural (Table 1). The earth logic research action plan also ensured the data generated and analysed are in line with our prime focus: degrowth in the fashion sector. This coding type is referred to as “a-priori coding” since the categories are set before the data collection and then revised, if necessary (Weber, 1990).

1- Less Landscape	1a	Forms of downsizing (not confined to narrow lens of consumerism) & creative resource use (trade in the economies of time, creativity, community, imagination)
	1b	Political activity & disobedience
	1c	Rethink belonging, ownership, sense of identity (human warmth and memory)
	1d	Essential skills and mindsets of users of less (maintenance of clothing, micro practices of every day care)
2- Local Landscape	2a	Use of nearby resources, place-specific knowledge, community self-reliance/wellbeing
	2b	Sense of rooted identity and community (companionship between producers and consumers)
	2c	Decentralisation of power (confrontation with the forces of globalisation)
3- Plural Landscape	3a	Decentering fashion (honour fashion in non-Western geographies, plurality of fashion voices, use norm critical and norm creative lenses)
	3b	Inclusive fashion (supporting marginalised individuals and communities)
	3c	New relationship between fashion and nature (human needs are not addressed at the expense of other life forms)

Table 1: Coding categories

The table describes our coding categories for the data generated through the content analysis of websites and Instagram accounts. It presents the first three landscapes (Less, Local and Plural) of the Earth logic research action plan, proposed by Fletcher & Tham (2019). The subcategories (e.g 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, etc.) reflect different dimensions within a specific landscape, and was mainly used to better categorise the data generated.

Source: Own illustration adapted from the Earth logic research action plan (Fletcher & Tham, 2019).

4.3.2 Thematic analysis of key informant interviews

Following the content analysis of the website and Instagram accounts, it became evident that the complexities behind implementing such strategies of change were often or even never shared. To generate data, for each of our four cases, on the challenges and opportunities of implementing socio-cultural change towards a degrowth transition in the fashion sector, we organised key informant interviews. Following a semi-structured approach, we drafted a set of eight open questions (see Appendix B). To unravel the complexity of each case’s opportunities and challenges when trying to implement socio-cultural changes, we shortened the question as much as possible. The thematic analysis, applied to our data collection of interviews, supported our analysis by discovering recurring patterns across the four key informants. As a method, the thematic analysis allows for us as researchers

to be 'active' and select themes we ourselves found interesting in relation to our research aim (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Identifying key informants who are able to answer the questions with the best knowledge is crucial when selecting participants (Alsaawi, 2014). To do so, we aimed at interviewing the founder of each social innovation. We managed to do so for F/ACT Movement (Adrian Zethraeus) and Popswap (Lin Kowalska). For Fashion Revolution, the two founders were contacted but had to decline because of a lack of availability. We then contacted Christine Gent, the Global Community Director of Fashion Revolution, who agreed to be interviewed. Regarding Small but Perfect, which is an initiative built by a group of partners, it is hard to identify one specific founder. After contacting the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO), one of Small But Perfect's main partners, we got directed to Anastasia Naxaki (Assistant Coordinator). Before engaging with each representative of our four cases, we made sure each participant understood the terms of the interviews (e.g. right to remain anonymous, right to withdraw, right to record etc.) by sharing an "Information and Consent Sheet". The interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted between 45 and 54 minutes. All were recorded and then transcribed to facilitate the analysis of the data generated.

The analysis thereafter followed a thematic analysis approach where we identified patterns among the key informant interviews, to find themes and gain insights into our analysis. For our second research question, as we want to investigate the institutional environments in which the social innovations operate, we first selected parts from the interviews where external enablers or barriers were mentioned. Thereafter, the second round of analysis aimed at finding recurring themes across the data set according to enablers or barriers of either social-cultural or politico-economic nature. Accordingly, the result section in this thesis will present and analyse according to two themes, socio-cultural conditions and politico-economic conditions, in order to understand the social innovations' institutional environments.

4.4 Limits of methodology

Using a multi-case study methodology in social sciences can be easily debated. We understand that our four cases may support our theory, but that they do not represent a general truth. Indeed, following a multi-case study approach will at the initial stage be subjective whilst the outcome of the analysis hopes to support a basis for further research (Flyvbjerg, 2006). We also acknowledge that a multi-case study

methodology can be criticised in terms of reliability and consistency. As the author of the coding categories (Table 1), we understand that the reliability coefficient of our coding categories may be inflated, as Krippendorff (2018) suggests. However, we have used a coding system that is as specific as possible to avoid such consequences and maximise the reliability and consistency of our chosen methodology.

5 Result & Analysis

Following the above methodology, the next two sections describe and analyse the result generated by the content analysis of websites and Instagram accounts, as well as the result from the thematic analysis of our key informant interviews. In the first section, we answer our first sub-research question: What strategies of change are the social innovations F/ACT Movement, Popswap, Fashion Revolution and Small but Perfect use to promote fashion values, norms and/or practices in line with degrowth? In the second section, we answer our second sub-research question: How can the institutional environment enable or hinder the social innovations F/ACT Movement, Popswap, Fashion Revolution and Small but perfect to lead socio-cultural change in line with degrowth?

5.1 Strategies of change: activating degrowth values and practices

In the first section of our result and analysis, we seek to understand how social innovations approach inner and outer dimensions , by investigating the strategies of change they use to promote new norms, values and practices, in line with degrowth. Guided by the values of sufficiency, companionship and diversity, representing respectively the Less, Local and Plural landscape, the analysis is thereafter two-fold. Firstly we investigate the outer transformations enabled by social innovations through fashion practices. Secondly, we investigate the inner transformations promoted via communication strategies through fashion values.

5.1.1 Sufficiency

The Less Landscape in the earth logic research action plan refers directly to the value of sufficiency, as it aims to dematerialise fashion practice, meaning restricting the material throughput and fashion's dependence on natural resources (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). Sufficiency means understanding what is enough to make the individual and/or the community content. Such fashion practices, as will be exemplified in the following, involve a variety of practices that explore ways of prolonging the wear of clothes and consume less. F/ACT movement engages sufficiency by promoting various fashion practices that reduce the consumer's demand for newly produced clothes. These are activated by various means

such as: challenges of shopping-free months, buying exclusively secondhand clothes, trying out fashion renting services, or mending workshops. Working on a variety of fashion practices that resembles sufficiency, Fashion Revolution, much like F/ACT Movement approaches these by activating fashion practices, rather than providing a service, relying much on communication to motivate and inspire behavioural change. For example by providing a “Wardrobe Audit” (Fashion Revolution, 2022) protocol in Fashion Revolution’s Instagram, for people “to take a deep dive into how you value your clothes, financially *and* on an emotional level” (Fashion Revolution, 2022c). Additionally, by arranging remake workshops, F/ACT movement provides tools and knowledge on how to repair garments instead of buying new ones, in line with the value of sufficiency. In contrast, Popswap enables digital swaps via their app, thereby engaging with sufficiency by providing a service to keep clothes in use for a longer period of time at a communal level. In other words, the service enables communal sufficiency, rather than individual sufficiency, as clothes are shared among various people. As such, a wardrobe update is enabled whilst this fashion activity at the same time means less material throughput. As for Small but Perfect, we can understand their work on sufficiency in relation to their application criteria where “Applicants must explain if and how the proposed product or service integrates and promotes circularity”. Being a prerequisite to joining the programme, the application criteria disclose Small But Perfect’s ambitions. Meaning that the businesses they seek to support, as part of the accelerator programme, themselves have to work under the premises of a decreased extraction of new raw materials, in line with the value of sufficiency.

When investigating the ways in which sufficiency is communicated and consequently, the strategies of promoting sufficiency as a fashion value - we can see that it goes beyond promoting alternative fashion practices. We find that on a communicational level, values of sufficiency are commonly narrated to evoke emotions of empowerment. Examples are found among all of the social innovations. Fashion Revolution promotes values of the sufficiency as exemplified here “And before you buy something, inform yourself about it [...] Do you really need it? If we think a little more before we buy, we can change the world one outfit at a time.” (Fashion Revolution, 2018). By narrating in this empowering manner, buying less becomes a means of “changing the world one outfit at a time” (Fashion Revolution, 2018). F/ACT Movement also narrates the value of sufficiency in ways of empowerment and increased well-being as displays the experience of their factivist as part of their communications: “I have no need to own anymore, on the contrary, I rather get anxiety from owning too much which is why I love being able to give or lend things to friends and vice versa” (F/ACT Movement, 2019). In a similar manner, Popswap communicates about the environmental benefits of swapping by making the practice of

swapping an action of climate reduction. As exemplified in the citation below, such a narrative empowers the Popswap community to continue to champion communal sufficiency as means of reducing their climate impact: “Buy a new pair of jeans or save 2 000 gallons of water? There ARE solutions to updating your closet that don't hurt our planet: one solution is to SWAP.”(Popswap, 2022b) Finally, Small but Perfect also narrates sufficiency in an empowering manner, indicated by statement such as “We believe that in the smallest places, we can often find the most innovative solutions. We don’t have to rely on big business for systemic change in the fashion industry.”(Fashion Revolution, 2022a). Therefore, claiming that innovative solutions are not dependent on big businesses, seeing potential in all spaces, including limited spaces.

5.1.2 Companionship

The Local Landscape in the earth logic research action plan refers directly to the value of companionship, as it recognises community’s well-being and self-reliance. The fashion practice of companionship can be exemplified in ways the social innovations form communities and seek knowledge exchange between stakeholders. We can detect that the social innovations work closely with their networks and retrieve knowledge among various stakeholders either from their own internal operations or beyond. For example, Adrian Zethraeus explains how the F/ACT Movement programme enables knowledge exchange between citizens, municipalities and the fashion sector. As such he describes the programme as a “process and methodology to gain insight into how new innovations, products and services should be designed and configured, in order to create value for both consumers and the companies” (A. Zethraeus, personal communication, 24th March 2022). Following such an argument, one can see that as the F/ACT Movement programme aims to create value for both consumers and companies, there is a greater belief in their relational positions which discloses a form of companionship between the two. One should not jump to the conclusion that this entails a mutual and non asymmetric relationship between consumers (buyers) and companies (sellers), but rather it discloses the importance of local knowledge exchange to render value for both parties. As exemplified with Popswap, we can understand the notion of swapping as an action that removes the power associated with asymmetries in a traditional buyer-seller relationship. Instead, the community of fellow Popswappers, exchange clothes for free and under their own communal rules. As such, the Popswap app enables those acts of companionship. Therefore, as seen by these two examples, companionship is rather internalised among the social innovations

operations, this also holds true for Fashion Revolution and Small but Perfect. For Fashion Revolution, companionship is fostered on a global level as part of the organisational structure. The work and support of their global teams is built on companionship and trust in the local team's capacity to mobilise within their own countries. For Small but Perfect, companionship can also be understood as internalised as the accelerator programme creates a network of sustainable SMEs by enabling cross country collaborations and peer-learning sessions.

As we look at communications as a strategy of change and the activation of companionship according to this strategy, the most explicit example are narrated by F/ACT Movement and Popswap. This is found in the examples in which F/ACT Movement and Popswap narrate a shared identity among their participants/users, by calling them f/activist and popswappers. Popswap also establishes companionship by trying to create a sense of rooted identity and community, using terms such as "Style twin" (Popswap, 2022a). Likewise, F/ACT Movement refers to its practitioners as f/activist. By sharing the stories from those already involved or those identifying themselves as f/activists, F/ACT Movement actively urges its followers to "Become a conscious consumer. Become a f/activists" (F/ACT Movement, 2022b). Possibly, by establishing these new senses of rooted identities, values of companionship arise among fellow popswappers or f/activists. In a different manner, by sharing narratives beyond their own operations, Fashion Revolution establishes a sense of companionship between fashion wearers and textile workers in examples like this "[...] look at the stitching. Notice its wavy seams, and where the loose ends of the threads have been cut off- these are all traces of the work done by the people who made your clothes." (Fashion Revolution, 2018). Indeed, making the reader aware of the relationship between the fashion wearer and the textile worker, it can be argued to be a strategy to evoke a sense of companionship, whilst challenging the capitalist alienation and power relations in the global fashion supply chains. Likewise, Small But Perfect narrates the notion of collaboration and frames it as a revolutionary act against capitalist mindsets "The Power of Connection. When small businesses join forces, they challenge competitive capitalist mindsets and learn to level up together" (Fashion Revolution, 2022b). Such a narrative explicitly promotes their accelerator programme and positions the Small But Perfect programme as 'beyond' capitalists.

5.1.3 Diversity

The Plural Landscape in the Earth Logic refers directly to the value of diversity, as it insists on the necessity of new forms of relationships between human beings and nature, and to support marginalised

individuals and communities by decentering fashion to non-western geographies (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). Diversity, in the sense of the pluriverse, is described as the antithesis of the universal concept of a world based solely on western standards (Escobar, 2015). Thus, promoting diversity in various geographical and ideological spheres (Escobar, 2015). When addressing diversity in the outer dimensions through fashion practices, the social innovations are for the most part euro-centric, operating either within Sweden and/or Europe, with Fashion Revolution being an exception, working globally in over 90 countries. Despite this, we can detect their efforts to decentralise power among their stakeholders as an act of diversifying. Again, similar to the action on companionship, rather than being an explicit fashion practice, the social innovations internalise diversity as part of their own operational structures. Working in a diverse structure of a global network, Christine Gent explains that whilst providing support to these country teams, they operate under their own premises and therefore, they “should be doing that from their own grassroots organisations in their own countries”(C. Gent, personal communication, 3rd April 2022). Fashion Revolution, therefore, works to support these group constitutions and create the infrastructure to address those key concerns from the Fashion Revolution manifesto they deem important in their own countries. In contrast, working exclusively within Sweden, F/ACT Movement operates in a small geographic scope and diversity in terms of how joining their programme was identified as a challenge by Adrian Zethraeus “Of course, we want a diversified mix of people but still we get maybe 98% women applying.” (A. Zethraeus, personal communication, 24th March 2022). Such overrepresentation of women hinders the F/ACT Movement’s activation of diversity and their work on sustainable fashion practices becomes limited to this demographic. Another example of diversity, can be seen by decentralising the power to the users of the Popswap app, upon which its value is co-created and exchanged among its users. Likewise, Small but Perfects’ cross-country collaboration, network creation and peer-learning render co-creation between participants.

When investigating communication as a strategy of change, we can clearly detect that diversity, as an anti-thesis of the universal concept of humanity, is rarely narrated by most social innovations. Again, Fashion Revolution is seen as an exception. For example, by often communicating and supporting marginalised communities, Fashion Revolution raises awareness of Cultural Indigenous People Month (#CulturalIPMonth), celebrating and respecting the diversity of artisan crafts within fashion (Fashion Revolution, 2022f). The void seen among the other social innovations shows a notable lack of activating these fashion values as part of their strategies of change. Being a central component of socio-cultural changes and degrowth, if not communicated in fashions’ degrowth transformation it risks reinforcing capitalist values of standardisation and eurocentrism.

5.1.4 Applied Strategies of change

Seemingly, our analysis of the strategies of change activates both the inner and outer dimensions of the values of sufficiency, companionship and diversity. In this integrated strategy, we see that these values are framed within their communications, whilst also being facilitated by either their own operations and/or their services. Indeed, this can on a theoretical level, according to integral theory, be seen as a plausible strategy for changing the fashion system in accordance with degrowth. However, on a practical level, neither our study nor the theory can ensure those effects. Likewise, we need to be honest about the fact that these four social innovations are currently operating in an entrenched capitalist fashion system. To intervene in such a system is not an easy endeavour. Therefore, in the next section, we seek to understand the institutional environment in which these social innovations are operating.

5.2 The institutional environment: an enabler or barrier of socio-cultural change

Learning from the key informants' experiences, we understand how different institutional environments might either enable or hinder their work. Social innovations, according to the definition used in this thesis, seek to "change social practices and/or structures" (Rueede & Lurtz, 2012). On such understanding, the social innovation's ambition and the process are dependent on transformative change in people's values, norms and practices. In this thesis, the scale of transformative change is limited to the fashion sector. Nevertheless, one must be cognisant of the fact that the fashion sector does not operate in isolation from other societal practices or structures. Indeed, this is evident once analysing the opportunities and challenges our key informants' expressed during our interviews. As such, we approach social innovation theory from a structuralist perspective to understand the institutional environment and structural conditions available. In other words, we hereby investigate the societal barriers and enablers that impact the process of social innovations. Accordingly, in the following we analyse the institutional environments that our key informants point to as structural conditions that impact their work by investigating the opportunities and challenges they explained in relation to (i) socio-cultural and (ii) politico-economic systems.

5.2.1 Socio-cultural conditions

A socio-cultural condition that was found in our analysis was the uncertainty of how the social innovations should position themselves in relation to the conventional fashion system and its institutional environment. As such, they alluded to the need to navigate around the delicate position in which the social innovations are trying to transform the conventional fashion system by forms of resistance on the one hand, and by forms of collaboration on the other. On such an understanding, examples from our interviews note that network relationships can help to reach their visions for the fashion sector and mobilise the sector towards sustainable practices. But at the same time, it was discussed to be prone to conflicts of interest and risks being perceived as greenwashing. Seeing both opportunities and challenges of interacting with the conventional fashion system, its stakeholders and its institutional environment. Both Christine Gent from Fashion Revolution and Lin Kowalska from Popswap shared their experiences when working with conventional fashion stakeholders. Christine Gent described their ambitions of being inclusive, explaining that meaningful discussion can arise “whether they're people we agree with or don't agree with” (C. Gent, personal communication, 3rd April 2022). Moreover, Fashion Revolution’s website discloses its mission to mobilise various stakeholders, as it provides resources to consumers, brands, retailers, producers, unions, educators, journalists and more. For Popswap, Lin Kowalska believes that collaboration is good once it sits under a shared aim. However, Lin Kowalska also sees a challenge in such collaboration, as they can be perceived as greenwashing from an outsider perception. Seemingly, building relationships and interactions with conventional fashion stakeholders is a socio-cultural determinant that needs consideration. However, the examples disclose that there is an ambition to interact between the polarised positions between the social innovations and the conventional fashion sector. Thus, as described by the key informants, this polarised field is discussed as a possible enabler to create socio-cultural change in the fashion sector. In social innovation theory, this external support is also recognized when describing the scale-up process “Often the innovative and creative ‘bees’ (social entrepreneurs or inventors) need to find supportive “trees” (big organizations with the machineries to make things happen on a big scale)” (Mulgan, 2006 p.153).

5.2.2 Politico-economic conditions

Considering the politico-economic conditions discussed by the key informants, we can detect a greater distinction between the opportunities and the challenges they have experienced. As F/ACT Movement

and Small but Perfect are supported by governmental institutions, both explained how the political environment in terms of sustainability has facilitated their work. Accordingly, F/ACT Movement explained how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ supported their work on sustainable consumption by providing a core framework. One can assume that this sustainability direction of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development possibly created good political conditions for the Region Västra Götaland² and The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency³ to finance and make the F/ACT Movement project part of their actions on sustainable development. In a similar manner, as Small but Perfect is co-funded by the European Union, one can assume the sustainability directions currently apparent in the European Union political landscape as a supportive environment. By providing policy dialogues in the Small but Perfect programme, as informed by Anastasia Naxaki, one can also see the ambitions of knowledge exchange between the participants and policymakers. Indeed, this creates an opportunity to influence policies that go in line with the ambitions of Small but Perfect. To a greater extent, this close link to governmental institutions, consequently creates a good potential for influencing policy and legislation according to degrowth. Undeniably, allies in politics set good conditions for social innovation acceleration (Mulgan, 2006).

For Fashion Revolution and Popswap funding is more uncertain, with no stable funding currently. Without stable financial support, much of Fashion Revolution's work among its global network is on a voluntary basis. This is an economic condition that Christine Gent describes is prone to render voluntary burn-out, and thus they work deliberately to create better foundations for the country teams to operate. Fashion Revolution, therefore, works to support the country teams in forming legal entities in their own countries, as such enabling Fashion Revolution enthusiasts and members to seek their own funding possibilities to support their operations. Indeed, funding creates a vulnerability and challenges in Fashion Revolution's organisational structure. Lin Kowalska from Popswap also shared her experience working in the uncertainties of investment rounds. On this, Lin Kowalska shared that the statistics currently play against women in Sweden to get governmental funding, identifying this structural issue as a challenge for female entrepreneurs. In fact, the Eurofound (2019) shares this understanding, as it found that female entrepreneurs only represent a small portion of the total number of entrepreneurs in the European Union. Getting "adequate funding, access to the right networks, and finding the right information and advice" (p.54) were reported as prime hurdles for female entrepreneurs (Eurofound, 2019). Being a

¹ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: United Nations directions for sustainable development, based on a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets.

² Region Västra Götaland is the county council governing the territory Västra Götaland in Sweden.

³ The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency conducts and coordinates Sweden's environmental work.

female-dominated sector, the fashion sector might find even greater barriers in terms of funding, as experienced and elucidated by Lin. Economic conditions can indeed be a barrier, especially when social innovations aim to move from pilot ideas to becoming mainstream (Mulgan, 2006).

5.2.3 Working in institutional environments

As seen in the above findings the institutional environment, both in terms of socio-cultural and politico-economic conditions, poses opportunities and challenges for the social innovations. As part of the institutional environment, those socio-cultural and politico-economic conditions therefore can be understood as either enablers or barriers to the social innovations. Without providing an exhaustive list of various socio-cultural and politico-economic determinants in the analysis above, we can understand the themes above as important since the interviewees themselves elucidated these challenges and opportunities. As we continue in the next section, we will discuss further how the results and analysis of sections 5.1 and 5.2 can be understood in relation to previous research and current degrowth debates.

6 Discussion

In the discussion section that follows, we unpack the findings from the previous section by connecting it to concepts and findings from previous research. In addition, we point to some particular findings for further elaboration. As such, we land on conclusions that help us answer our overarching research question: How can social innovations in the fashion sector contribute to a socio-cultural change towards degrowth?

6.1 Socio-cultural change towards degrowth

To answer our overarching question, we first unpack the value of sufficiency, companionship and diversity in relation to concepts and findings from previous research to further understand how these values contribute to a socio-cultural change towards degrowth.

6.1.1 Sufficiency

Operationalising the degrowth transition will need new narratives, as described previously in our results, that promote different types of abundance and wellness. Following the above findings of how sufficiency as both a fashion practice and fashion value is found within the social innovations, we can see that all four cases work with an integral strategy of socio-cultural change, investigating both inner and outer dimensions, to enable a degrowth transition. On such findings, it is safe to say that communication is a notable strategy among these social innovations, to narrate sufficiency in ways that provoke personal, behavioural, cultural and social change. Sufficiency is the antithesis of overproduction and overconsumption, highlighting the unnecessary need of consuming for the sake of economic growth, imposed by the capitalist regime (Vladimirova, 2021). Sufficiency is often expressed through the concepts of consumption corridors, indicating the space between the minimum and maximum consumption standards, quantifying the number of garments sufficient for an individual (Vladimirova, 2021). This concept is in line with the degrowth transition, by ensuring that in the fashion sector, new values, norms and practices do not affect generations to come and their wellbeing. Additionally, sufficiency goes in line with the Easterlin paradox, which demonstrates that beyond a certain point more income, and indirectly more consumption, does not correlate with more happiness (Büchs & Koch, 2019). It is important to note that most, if not all, societies based on increased consumption express a

growing disconnect with well-being, clearly showing that growth and wellbeing are two different concepts that should not be mistaken for each other (Sharpe et al., 2022). In fact, the democratisation of consumption has even enabled mass consumption, triggered by an obsession for social status and an artificial sense of belonging, completely disregarding both the value of sufficiency and the cost on socio-ecological systems (Samuel & Ko, 2019). On top of that, the growth paradigm has created conditions of scarcity that may create tendencies towards more autocratic forms of governance to protect socio-cultural and politico-economic stability (Crownshaw et al., 2018). The value of sufficiency is highly relevant to creating a multidimensional conceptualisation of well-being rather than understanding well-being as material consumption (Sharpe et al., 2022). By working in direct and indirect ways with sufficiency, as a value, our social innovations contribute to a socio-cultural change in line with the degrowth transition.

6.1.2 Companionship

Looking at the findings of how the social innovations work with companionship to enable a socio-cultural change in line with degrowth, it is notable that rather than being a fashion practice in itself, companionship is often internalised within the social innovations' own operations. Social value creation of recognition, compassion, identity, autonomy, and care is a common motive of social innovations (Mulgan, 2006; Krlev et al, 2018). Social value creation can take many forms, such as stakeholder co-creation, collaboration or just creating new connections between individuals. In our thesis, the value of companionship is mainly expressed by practices of knowledge sharing and collaboration, and therefore as an enabler of a degrowth transition in the fashion sector.. By creating new identities and recognising relationships within their own operations or beyond, the social innovations in this thesis activate inner dimensions, and consequently cultural change. As Noto La Diega (2019) notes, we often buy fashion items that others also buy, emphasising that the role of communities in creating identities through positional value, like consumption of garments, is deeply entrenched in socio-cultural context. In fact, to avoid social exclusion, individuals will follow the community consumption patterns (Aspers & Godart, 2013). This shows that the role of the community on the individual, enacted through values like companionship, is crucial in enabling new fashion values, norms and/or practices. Companionship and a sense of community seem to be notable strategies in all four cases. As proponents of the degrowth transition stress the importance of community wellbeing and human welfare, as part of the broader

ambition of socio-cultural change (Kallis et al., 2018), it is crucial to insist on the value of companionship to ensure socio-cultural change towards degrowth.

6.1.3 Diversity

As our findings disclose, the social innovations have a discrepancy in engaging with the value of diversity, both in terms of inner and outer dimensions. In the case of the inner dimensions, valuing diversity is crucial to allow different identities to coexist. As seen in the previous paragraph, fashion can be both inclusive and exclusive and while some actors value a diversity of identities, others prefer to fit in the community (Aspers & Godart, 2013). A world in which degrowth is a reality will need to make sure a pluriverse sense of fashion is implemented, so that each individual is allowed to express their individuality, and thereby facilitating wellbeing. In the case of the outer dimensions, there seem to be ambitions to diversify and decentralise power among the social innovation's operational structures. While globalisation has made the fashion sector a powerful one, it also has enabled power imbalances, such as asymmetries or imitations mechanisms, that are weakening small players (Noto La Diega, 2019), including social innovations. A degrowth transition needs to go further than that to ensure that innovation, mainly from smaller players, is not only protected, but also valued for its diversity of ideas, and the role it takes in the pluriverse. To some extent, the lack of communication and actions around diversity among the social innovations in this study, is surprising as it remains central to the degrowth transition and its ideologies. However, as communication in itself can be seen as a strategy of change for transforming the fashion sector in line with degrowth, we believe a greater emphasis should be placed on communicating values of diversity. Future envisioning degrowth will be highly temporally and geographically heterogeneous (Crownshaw et al., 2018). On such belief, Vandeventer et al. (2019) also highlights the pathway for transition should seek to develop micro-regimes (in contrast to the hegemonic growth regime) to coexist and learn from each other. Shifting in values and consequently, systems in line with degrowth allow the pursuit of well-being in co-existence, including all humans, other living beings and to a greater extent nature (Nesterova, 2021). Diversity as a value narrated in such manners can indeed render feelings of interconnectedness and companionship that can possibly change people's norms, values and practices contributing to a socio-cultural change in line with degrowth.

6.2 Taking a leap on degrowth in the fashion sector.

As we follow up the discussion of sufficiency, companionship and diversity, we will in this section elaborate on our findings further and pose suggestions on future research. As such, in the following last three paragraphs of this discussion, we discuss our findings in relation to concepts of the growth 'lock-in', framing and new institutional environment.

6.2.1 A new state of mind: from growth to wellbeing

When investigating the theme sufficiency it was evident that all cases enable or promote a dematerialisation of fashion practice. Although assumptions can be made that by conveying in such fashion practice the result is less material throughput in the fashion sector, one cannot escape the fact that some practices still promote a fashion value of 'more'. The most explicit example found in our empirical research, is the fashion practice of swapping. Enabled by the Popswap app and promoted by F/ACT Movement, swapping was framed as a fashion practice where people can get more and new fashion without buying newly produced clothes. While we analyse this as a notion of communal sufficiency, suggesting that within the community there are enough clothes to make the community content, we understand it continues to reproduce values of growth. Consequently, a question one could ask is how to handle the value growth in a degrowth fashion sector? In terms of limiting the fashion sector's impact on socio-ecological systems, a dematerialisation is needed and a transition from overconsumption to swapping will have those effects. However, as it reproduces values of growth, fashion practices of swapping do not activate an inner transformation of the fashion system and growth continues to be internalised in people's mindsets. Instead what is valued and exchanged between people who swap is possibly the sense of wellbeing that is activated when people get their hands on something new. If sufficiency was properly adopted as a value, that sense of wellbeing could be sought elsewhere and hopefully not dependent on materialistic means. To combat such growth 'lock in', upon which growth is deeply anchored in people's mindsets and thus pursued as a personal fulfilment, is undeniably difficult (Büchs & Koch, 2019). However, degrowth scholars dismantle the fact that there is "no universal causal link between human wellbeing and the consumption of goods and services" (Kallis et. al., 2012 p.174). This also is echoed in fashion research, where a study found that "a materialistic, fashion oriented consumer exhibits a lower well-being compared to a style-oriented consumer" (Gwozdz et al., 2017 p.14), disclosing that more fashion materialism does not increase fashion wearers' wellbeing.

Indeed, in the pursuit of increased wellbeing, there are reasons to seek beyond growth-oriented practices. What could be elaborated on further is that swapping, as a fashion practice is easy to adopt, and does not need to radical shifts in people's mindsets and values. Therefore, swapping could be seen as an opening move for the fashion degrowth transition upon which degrowth practices can operationalise in parallel to the conventional fashion system.

6.2.2 New frames and new identities

When it comes to activating fashion values of degrowth, we have in this study looked at communication as a strategy of change. If it is a plausible strategy is however uncertain and needs further elaboration. A brief look at the concept of framing and cognitive framing processes, communication and language is on the one hand argued important when it comes to how we perceive the world (Lakoff, 2010). On the other hand, to change any cognitive frames, new language is deemed to have a limited effect (Lakoff, 2010). On such an understanding, in the example of fashion, even if fashion values of sufficiency, companionship and diversity are communicated it does not automatically change people's behaviour accordingly. However, what cognitive framing scholars suggest for best practice in using communication as a strategy for change, is to make it work emotionally according to existing frames (Lakoff, 2010). Still as we are reminded,, the growth paradigm is a highly entrenched thought system and that degrowth mindsets therefore have a great challenge in materialising in our cognitive frames (Büchs & Koch, 2019). Finding solutions to such challenges goes beyond the scope of this thesis, but poses interesting questions for further research. What we however can discuss is whether or not framing processes as found in the communications strategies used by the cases could possibly have an impact on how fashion is perceived. For instance, how does the identity crafting strategies used by F/ACT Movement and Popswap, by naming their community as f/activist or popswappers, change our perception of fashion wearers? According to framing theory we know the possibility to change frames is limited, but seeing that these new identity terms can be used in exchange with 'consumers' it could very much be adopted and used to craft identities of degrowth. As such, one can assume the strategy behind social media campaigns, as F/ACT Movement's campaign "be a f/activist" (F/ACT Movement, 2022b), is an attempt to change the consumer narrative entrenched in today's fashion system. If adopted in scale, it could not just change the narrative linked to fashion wearers but could also legitimise the fact that fashion practice is not limited to consumerism.

6.2.3 A better institutional environment ahead to scale up?

Among the institutional barriers and enablers highlighted by the key informants in this study, we hereby want to further elaborate on the fact that the social innovations' encounters with the conventional fashion sector render both challenges and opportunities. In our analysis, we found this to be a socio-cultural condition as it was described in terms of positioning against and prone to a possible conflict of interest between them and stakeholders from the conventional fashion sector. Nonetheless, the key informants explained themselves as open to collaboration. To further decipher this and see the potential in collaborating, one could adopt the framework of the multi-level perspective for sustainability transitions (see for example: Geels, 2011). Used to understand how sustainable niches can transition to the regime, the multi-level perspective on sustainability transitions could inform various transition processes of how the fashion values and practices of the social innovations (the niche) could replace the conventional fashion values and practises (the regime). Moreover, strategic niche management could inform best practices (see for example: Schot & Geels, 2008). Although an application of such frameworks is beyond the scope of this thesis, we want to elucidate the possibilities of further research. However, as this remains a real-life challenge for the social innovations, we believe there is an aspect of scale to consider once opting for collaboration with conventional fashion stakeholders. When it comes to fashion practice, the reach of influence could render possibles for degrowth fashion practices to be adopted by the masses. In the case of fashion values, collaboration could render learning processes at a bigger scale upon which degrowth fashion values can be adopted. Meaning that, in our opinion, there are reasons for collaboration when it comes to scaling up fashion values and fashion practices. But with that being said, we understand the difficulties of those collaborations being perceived as greenwashing and/or hard to put into practice due to various conflicts of interest. Undoubtedly, future research should point to best practice for social innovations in the fashion sector to scale up. Possibly, as seen in the analysis, governmental support might be a better avenue to explore. Therefore, we echo one of the policy opportunities Sharpe et al. (2022) propose for the fashion sector:

[...] policy support for sustainable and less profit-driven activities in the fashion and textile sector. This could include resources for not-for-profit business structures, regulations ensuring 'easy-start' not-for-profit businesses, tax incentives and other support such as access to seed funding, incubator support, legal and other business services. (Sharpe et al., 2022, p.7)

Such governmental support would indeed support the challenges of funding that both Fashion Revolution and Popswap highlighted, and create better opportunities for social innovations to independently scale up.

As we wrap up, we can clearly see that the fashion sector's degrowth transition hold various aspects to consider and discuss, far more than what this thesis allows. Moving on to the conclusions in the next and final section, we hope to again stress the potentials of social innovation's to lead the socio-cultural change of fashion, in line with the degrowth transition.

7 Conclusion

How to “walk the talk” when it comes to fashion’s degrowth transition? Undeniably, the immense socio-ecological pressures stemming from the fashion sector is attributed to overproduction and overconsumption of clothes. Whilst technical fixes are adopted by the fashion sector, there needs to be a socio-cultural change to reach the root cause of the fashion system’s unsustainable values and practices. Although the degrowth movement is debated as a plausible solution, we found a gap in research in explaining how such a transition can materialise in the fashion sector. On such a research gap, our thesis aimed to get an empirically based understanding of social innovations’ strategies of change, in the fashion sector, in order to enable socio-cultural change in line with degrowth. Accordingly, seeing social innovations as actors of change in the fashion sector’s transition to degrowth, the four cases of F/ACT Movement, Fashion Revolution, Popswap and Small but Perfect provided empirical insights to answer our overarching research question: How can social innovations in the fashion sector contribute to a socio-cultural change towards degrowth?

To conclude this thesis, social innovations in the fashion sector can contribute to a socio-cultural change towards degrowth through different means. While a various set of strategies of change was notable among all four cases, all of them either promoted, enabled and/or internalised fashion values and fashion practices in line with degrowth. That being said, approaching the value of diversity, in comparison to the values of sufficiency and companionship, is relatively challenging or even lacking for most our cases. As diversity is crucial to the degrowth transition, there needs to be a stronger focus on such a value to optimise socio-cultural change. Similarly, it also crucial to reiterate that working with both inner and outer dimensions, or in our case, fashion values, norms and practices, is the sole path to a holistic and integral transition towards degrowth. Although being in line with some values of degrowth like sufficiency, some fashion practices pushed by social innovations, such as swapping, continue to feed the growth logic. On such a finding, it becomes evident that a deeper socio-cultural change delving into inner dimensions is needed alongside social innovations’ new practices to implement a degrowth transition. Furthermore, we can also conclude that the role of the institutional environment, more specifically the socio-cultural and politico-economic conditions, in enabeling or hindering such a socio-cultural change is paramount in promoting a degrowth transition. Additionally, it is undeniable that fashion values, norms and practices need to scale up and replace conventional ones, led by the growth logic.

To sum up, there are clear evidence that social innovations, such as the four studied in this thesis, are leading a socio-cultural shift in fashion values, norms and practices in line with the degrowth transition. Nevertheless, it is crucial to reiterate that the degrowth transition's future success is highly dependent on improved institutional environments upon which social innovations can scale up and challenge entrenched mindsets spearheaded by the growth logic.

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Appendix A

Examples from current Degrowth Debate in the fashion sector (2021/2022)

Podcasts:

- Jason Hickel - Can degrowth save Fashion? - Wardrobe crisis (January 2021) -
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5aaTzOEiHDdgCvgva35mCv?si=2ab2e00e3ced4d19>
- In pursuit of balance - Tim Jackson talks post growth, Life After Capitalism - Wardrobe crisis (Februart 2022) -
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/01TS72YjdfQMtN1nbtqbj5?si=dffd6fdb6823415e>
- Can fashion and degrwoth coexist, and specifically - do high heels exist in a degrowth world? - Conscious chatter (February 2022) -
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/4S1nZT0Mcyj9QRAz2j7ib?si=c4d67170c87b46f9>

(Non Academic) Articles:

- Robinson, F. (2022). Degrowth: The Future Fashion Could Choose.
https://goodonyou.eco/degrowth-the-future-fashion/?utm_source=GoodOnYou-email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=control&utm_campaign=GOY-NL260422-ROW%234&utm_term=Newsletter&vero_id=Di14ygel1r&vero_conv=tjeUb-OTMKrX3qizL-WQU-w6U7ptFKLXYySNmKAZvNocSgHGf-wh5S8dHgPoAORm5dXBd2Wt2ZeFIdfMEzj43XDUQ5liYjPLPw%3D
- Vogue Business (2022). Degrowth: The future that fashion has been looking for?
<https://www.voguebusiness.com/sustainability/degrowth-the-future-that-fashion-has-been-looking-for>

Webinars:

- Extinction Rebellion (2021). Fashion and Degrowth Panel Discussion -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VzwkV0Br_A

Instagram accounts:

@post_growth https://www.instagram.com/post_growth/

@fashion_act_now https://www.instagram.com/fashion_act_now/

Appendix B

Interview questions

Below disclose the interview questions for our semi-structured interviews with key informants.

The interview will be semi structured and cover the following questions:

1. What problem or gap have you identified in the fashion sector that drove you to initiate Small but Perfect?
2. How did you make the move from problem identification to a tangible solution, such as Small but Perfect? Think about the environment that helped you, such as governmental incentives, financial support, network opportunities, mindset/cultural change...
3. What are your personal ambitions with Small but Perfect? Think about how it contributes to sustainable development.
4. What challenges did you face when creating Small but Perfect? Think about different scales, levels, stakeholders...
5. Do those challenges persist today while maintaining Small but Perfect?
6. If not, how did/do you overcome those challenges? / How do you measure success?