Workshop Facilitation Guide:

Ecolabel Recognition & Trust in Textile Fashion

WHY THIS WORKSHOP? A SCIENCE-BASED RATIONALE

Ecolabels are increasingly central to sustainability governance within the textile and fashion industry. They are designed to communicate environmental and social performance, guide consumer choices, and drive industry-wide improvements through market differentiation (Kesidou and Palm, 2024). However, despite their widespread use, ecolabels face persistent challenges related to clarity, credibility, and communication. They also oversimplify or obscure crucial details. Scientific studies (Boström and Klintman, 2008; Darnall and Aragón-Correa, 2014; Kesidou and Palm, 2024; Ranasinghe and Jayasooriya, 2021) consistently highlight two critical shortcomings; the lack of transparency in criteria and verification processes; and the ineffective communication of ecolabel meaning and substance.

Visual design such as logos, colours, and symbols, dominates consumer perception, leading to reliance on recognisable images rather than actual awareness of the underlying environmental criteria or certification rigor (Xiao et al., 2023). This visual dominance risks reducing ecolabels to mere marketing tools rather than evidence-based sustainability instruments.

At the same time, industry stakeholders face challenges in navigating the growing landscape of ecolabels as each vary in focus, credibility, and methodological robustness. The absence of standardised criteria across labels further limits comparability and undermines trust, both among producers and consumers (Kesidou and Palm, 2024). Moreover, regulations increasingly demand that
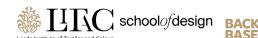.

sustainability claims be substantiated by verifiable, science-based evidence, adding to the need for better communication strategies that bridge the gap between technical rigour and consumer accessibility (Kesidou and Palm, 2025).

Through an interactive exercise, this workshop provides an opportunity to explore the gap between the *appearance* of ecolabels and their *actual substance*. The aim is to critically examine how visual design overshadows substantive criteria, contributing to misplaced trust or misunderstanding among consumers and other stakeholders. This exercise also opens reflection on the complexity of communicating scientifically grounded information through simple, market-facing symbols.

This workshop invites participants to:

- Reflect on how ecolabels shape perceptions and decisions

- Identify key barriers to transparency and comprehension

- Discuss how ecolabels could better balance clarity, accessibility, and scientific integrity

Ultimately, this session contributes to a broader conversation on how ecolabels and sustainability communication at large can evolve to support informed, meaningful, and trustworthy decision-making within the textile and fashion sector.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Logo Sheet including a mix of *four real* ecolabels (provided via external links) and *four fictional* logos (created for this workshop).

Note: This document does not reproduce copyrighted logos nor does it grant permission for their use. Instead, we provide:

- Links to publicly available, official ecolabels for participant reference.
- Fictional logos designed for this workshop, included on the Logo Sheet.

The ecolabels below are suggestions. To obtain authorised versions of these logos and to review the relevant usage guidelines, please refer to the official resources provided by the respective organisation:

A) Better Cotton Initiative, https://bettercotton.org/who-we-are/our-logo/
B) EU Ecolabel, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-07/EUEcolabel_LogoGuidelines_2022.pdf
C) Organic Content Standard, https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2021/02/OCS-101-V3.0-Organic-Content-Standard.pdf
D) Global Organic Textile Standard, https://global-standard.org/media-centre/gots-images

STEP-BY-STEP FACILITATION

Individual Reflection (5 minutes)

Ask participants to review the Logo Sheet:
Look at the eight ecolabels shown.

- Which logos do you recognise?
- Can you say anything on what each stands for?

Ask them to consider:

- What makes you feel confident about recognising certain logos?

What makes you confident about the focus of the ecolabel?

Group Discussion (10 minutes)
Facilitate an open discussion using these guiding questions:

- Which ecolabels felt familiar to you?

- Which ones were difficult to identify or understand?
- Which logos did you instinctively trust more – and why? (Was it due to their name, design, colour, familiarity, or other factors?)

THE REVEAL & DEEPER DISCUSSION

(10 minutes)

Share this insight:
"Actually, only four of these ecolabels are real – the other four were entirely made up for this exercise."

Then discuss:

- Were any of the fake logos convincing? Why did they seem credible (font, colour, icon, name, etc.)?
- Did any of the *real* ecolabels seem less trustworthy? What influenced this perception?
- Are there any *fictional* ecolabels you wish were real? Why?

REFLECTION ON ECOLABEL COMMUNICATION

(5 minutes)

Invite a brief reflective discussion:

- Were you surprised by which labels were real or fake?
- What does this reveal about how well ecolabels communicate their message or purpose?

- Are we truly aware of what these labels certify, or do we simply trust their appearance?
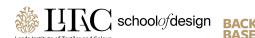
WRAP-UP & CLOSING THOUGHTS

(5 minutes)

Conclude with a forward-looking discussion:

- After this exercise, what do you see as the main challenge with ecolabels in fashion?
- What would improve consumer understanding? (*Fewer but better-known* ecolabels better *transparency* and *communication*?)

Thank participants for their valuable insights and remind them that their input will directly contribute to ongoing research on ecolabel effectiveness and policy development.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Boström, M., Klintman, M., 2008. Eco-standards, product labelling and green consumerism, Consumption and public life. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Darnall, N., Aragón-Correa, J.A., 2014. Can Ecolabels Influence Firms' Sustainability Strategy and Stakeholder Behavior? Organization & Environment 27, 319–327. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026614562963

Kesidou, P.E., Palm, C., 2025. Challenges of New Regulations and Strengths of Eco-Credential Standards in the UK's Textile and Fashion Industry. University of Leeds. https://doi.org/10.48785/100/330

Kesidou, P.E., Palm, C., 2024. Eco-Credentials in the Fashion and Textile Industry: Assessment and Evaluation: A Review of Eco-Credentials, their Strengths and Weaknesses, and Recommendations for Improvement. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.14261051

Ranasinghe, L., Jayasooriya, V.M., 2021. Ecolabelling in textile industry: A review. Resources, Environment and Sustainability 6, 100037. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resenv.2021.100037

Xiao, C., Wang, H., Zhou, Y., Li, Q., 2023. Dense is not green: How visual density influences greenness evaluation on environmentally friendly products. Front. Psychol. 13, 1035021. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1035021

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