Workshop Facilitation Guide

A workshop for insights to why sustainable change of the global textile fashion system is harder than it looks

WHY THIS WORKSHOP? A SCIENCE-BASED RATIONALE

The global textile and fashion industry is a multi-billion-dollar sector with disproportionately large environmental impacts (Niinimäki, 2011; Sajn and European Parliament, 2019; UNEP, 2020). Despite mounting concerns about climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion, environmental impacts from this industry continue to grow – largely because more clothing is being produced and discarded at an accelerating rate.

Numerous stakeholders – including policymakers, businesses, and academics – have proposed solutions to address these challenges. Yet, many of these efforts have fallen short of reversing the industry's negative environmental trajectory. This is not due to a lack of ideas or commitment, but rather the inherent complexity of the textile and fashion system itself. This system has been shaped over centuries by shifting cultural norms, technological developments, political regulations, and business practices (Palm, 2023). Addressing such deep-rooted dynamics requires a systems-thinking approach (Cornell et al., 2021).

This workshop is designed to help participants grasp this complexity. It offers a systems perspective on the barriers to transforming unsustainable practices within the textile and fashion industry.

A central focus of the workshop is ecolabels – tools used to communicate the environmental attributes of textile and fashion products. Ecolabels are intended to guide consumers toward more sustainable choices by indicating products with lower environmental impacts, often based on life-cycle assessments (Kesidou and Palm, 2024). However, the meaning, credibility, and effectiveness of these labels remain contested and often misunderstood.

In this workshop, ecolabels are used as a concrete entry point for exploring participants' assumptions, values, and perceptions of sustainability in fashion. Through interactive activities, participants will reflect on how visual cues – such as ecolabel logos – can overshadow the actual environmental content of certifications, potentially leading to confusion or misplaced trust.

The workshop draws on Q methodology (Brown, 1993; "Qmethod," 2025), a research approach specifically designed to explore diverse perspectives on complex issues. Unlike traditional surveys that merely assess factual knowledge, Q methodology uncovers how people think and what they value. In this context, it serves as a way to systematically map out participants' viewpoints on ecolabels, revealing tensions between perceived and actual sustainability outcomes.

By the end of the workshop, participants will have developed a deeper, more nuanced understanding of:

- The systemic barriers to sustainable change in the textile and fashion industry;

- The complexities of sustainability communication through ecolabels;

- How differing values and assumptions shape environmental decision-making.

Ultimately, this workshop aims to foster critical reflection and interdisciplinary dialogue about what it truly takes to transform the fashion industry towards sustainable circularity.

SUGGESTED OPENING SCRIPT

"Welcome to this workshop, which is designed to help us explore why changing the global textile and fashion system towards sustainabile circularity is far more challenging than it might appear at first glance.

Today, we'll focus on ecolabels – a tool commonly used by businesses to communicate environmental impacts in fashion. While ecolabels aim to provide trustworthy sustainability information, they also reveal deeper complexities about how we understand and make decisions about sustainability.

Through a hands-on activity we'll reflect not only on how ecolabels work, but also on our own assumptions, values, and perceptions. The goal here isn't to agree on the "right" answer, but rather to uncover the different perspectives in the room – and to highlight why systemic change in fashion is so difficult.

This session will give us space to think critically about ecolabels, sustainability communication, and the broader challenges of shifting towards more sustainable practices.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

This session includes individual reflection, small group work, and full group discussion. The total duration is approximately 45 minutes.

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

Welcome & Framing (5 min)

Start with a brief welcome and introduce the session's aim:*"To explore how ecolabels shape our perceptions of sustainability and why transforming the fashion system is so complex."*

Quick Icebreaker:
Ask participants to share one word they associate with ecolabels.

SORTING EXERCISE *(15 min)*

Brief Explanation of Q-Sort Activity:
Each participant receives:
* 20 statement cards about ecolabels and fashion sustainability.
* One Q-Sort grid for ranking.

Ask the participants to quickly read through all 20 statements (1–2 minutes).
Then to sort statements into three broad categories:
* Agree
* Neutral/Unsure
* Disagree (3 minutes).

Following that, ask them to rank the statements on the Q-Sort grid according to how strongly they agree or disagree (10 minutes).

Remind participants there are no right or wrong answers – the goal is to reflect their personal viewpoints.

FACILITATOR NOTE: UNDERSTANDING THE THEMES BEHIND THE STATEMENTS (for internal use only)

The 20 statements used in this workshop have been carefully developed to reflect a broad spectrum of debates around ecolabels in the textile and fashion industry. They cover five key themes commonly discussed in academic, industry, and policy settings, see Table 1.

Although participants are only presented with the printed statements (without any reference to themes), you as a facilitator can use this thematic structure to better steer discussions and draw out connections between participant reflections.

This table links each statement to its corresponding theme to help you:
* Notice patterns in how participants rank statements.
* Prompt deeper discussion if a particular theme is underexplored.
* Encourage participants to reflect on areas of disagreement or uncertainty.

Tip for Use: During the group discussion, you may wish to note which themes emerge organically and use this table to subtly introduce follow-up questions that broaden the conversation. For example, if most discussion centres on consumer trust, you could prompt reflection on ecolabel reliability or industry responsibility

Table 1. Linking statements to themes.

Themes	Do ecolabels actually tell us anything useful?	The reliability of ecolabel metrics	The numbers game – are ecolabels just another statistic?	Ecolabels and textile fashion industry decision-making	What could make ecolabels better?
Statements	Ecolabels give a clear picture of a product's environmental impact.	The way ecolabels measure sustainability is based on solid science.	Sustainability metrics in the textile fashion industry are improving.	Retailers and brands take ecolabels seriously and use them to improve sustainability.	A single, global ecolabel would make sustainability easier to understand.
	Too many ecolabels make it hard to know which ones to trust.	Different ecolabels use different methods, making it confusing to compare them.	Too much focus on numbers distracts from real change in the industry.	Supply chains are too complicated for ecolabels to track environmental impact properly.	Ecolabels need stricter regulations to prevent greenwashing and ensure real impact.
	If a product has an ecolabel, it must be more sustainable than one without.	Most ecolabels only tell part of the story – some big environmental impacts are missing.	Big brands use ecolabels to look good rather than to make real impact.	If more brands used ecolabels, the textile industry would be more sustainable.	The textile fashion industry is now committed enough to drive sustainability without stricter regulations.
	Some ecolabels are just marketing tools rather than real sustainability measures.	Consumers choose clothes that has an ecolabel over clothes that do not.	Consumers trust ecolabels even if they don't fully understand what they mean.	Ecolabels help consumers make better choices.	Technology like digital tracking could make ecolabels more trustworthy and verifiable.

GROUP REFLECTION & DISCUSSION
(15 min)

Pair Discussion (5 min):
Ask pairs to discuss:
• What felt easy or difficult to rank?
• Did any statements surprise them?

Facilitated full group discussion *(10 min)*
Guide the discussion by inviting participants to share:
• One statement they strongly agreed or strongly disagreed with, and why.
• Any patterns or common themes they noticed during the sorting.

Wrap up this part with a group question:
"What does this exercise reveal about how ecolabels shape decision-making?"

WRAP-UP & TAKEAWAYS *(10 min)*

Summarise key reflections and insights from the discussion.

Closing Question for Reflection:
"What is one thing you'll think differently about after this workshop?"

Encourage participants to continue reflecting on:
• The challenges of changing the textile and fashion system.
• The role of ecolabels in shaping both consumer behaviour and industry practice.
• The wider connections of ecolabels and textile fashion to global environmental sustainability.

FURTHER READING

Brown, S.R., 1993. A Primer on Q Methodology. osub 16. https://doi.org/10.22488/okstate.93.100504

Cornell, S., Häyhä, T., Palm, C., 2021. A sustainable and resilient circular fashion and textiles industry: Towards a circular economy that respects and responds to planetary priorities. Stockholm University's Stockholm Resilience Centre for the Ellen MacArthur Foundation and H&M Group, Stockholm, Sweden. https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.4561847

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

Niinimäki, K., 2011. From disposable to sustainable: the complex interplay between design and consumption of textiles and clothing. Aalto University.

Palm, C., 2023. The Global Fashion System On its social-ecological intertwinedness (Doctoral Thesis). Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden.

Qmethod [WWW Document], 2025. . Qmethod. URL https://qmethod.org/ (accessed 7.7.25).

Sajn, N., European Parliament, 2019. Environmental impact of the textile and clothing industry: What consumers need to know.

UNEP, U.N.E.P., 2020. Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain: Global stocktaking.

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BACK TO BASELINES
IN CIRCULAR FASHION AND TEXTILES

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Print the statement cards and Q-sort ranking grid in A3 format.

Ecolabels give a clear picture of a product's environmental impact.	Too many ecolabels make it hard to know which ones to trust.	If a product has an ecolabel, it is more sustainable than one without.	Some ecolabels are just marketing tools rather than real sustainability measures.	The way ecolabels measure sustainability is based on solid science.
A single, global ecolabel would make sustainability easier to understand.	Different ecolabels use different methods, making it confusing to compare them.	Most ecolabels only tell part of the story – some big environmental impacts are missing.	Consumers choose clothes that has an ecolabel over clothes that do not.	Big brands use ecolabels to look good rather than to make real impact.
Consumers trust ecolabels even if they don't fully understand what they mean.	Retailers and brands take ecolabels seriously and use them to improve sustainability.	Sustainability metrics in the textile fashion industry are improving.	Too much focus on numbers distracts from real change in the industry.	Supply chains are too complicated for ecolabels to track environmental impact properly.
If all brands used ecolabels, the textile industry would be sustainable.	Textile fashion firms are now committed enough to drive sustainability without stricter regulations.	Ecolabels help consumers make better choices.	Ecolabels need stricter regulations to prevent greenwashing and ensure real impact.	Technology like digital tracking will make ecolabels absolutely trustworthy and verifiable.

Strongly disagree ← — → **Neutral** ← — → **Strongly agree**

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3