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# Local clothing: What is that? How an environmental policy concept is understood

## ABSTRACT

*The textile industry is characterized by global mass production and has an immense impact on the environment. One garment can travel around the world through an extensive value chain before reaching its final consumption destination. The consumer receives little information about how the item was produced due to a lack of policy regulation. In this article, we explore understandings of 'local clothing' and how the concept could be an alternative to the current clothing industry. The analysis is based on fifteen interviews with eighteen informants from Western Norway as part of the research project KRUS about Norwegian wool. Five ways of understanding local clothing were identified from the interviews: production, place-specific garments, local clothing habits, home-based production and local circulation. We lack a language with which to describe local clothing that covers local forms of production as an alternative to current clothing production. As such, the article highlights an important obstacle to reorganization: local*

## KEYWORDS

localism  
clothing consumption  
language  
local production  
sustainability  
fashion vocabulary

*clothing needs a vocabulary among the public, in politics and in the public sector in general, with which to describe the diverse production processes behind clothing and textiles and their material properties.*

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The textile industry has grown rapidly due to the relaxation of trade in textile fibres in the 1980s, combined with cheap crude oil and a business model that encourages a continuous and rapid throwaway approach to products and production in low-cost countries (Changing Markets Foundation 2021). This established fashion production system is characterized by low-cost products, intensive marketing and global mass production (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst 2010). A small number of large companies dominate internationally, and even reuse is a global industry (Lu 2015). Garments often travel around the world before reaching a consumer in a destination country, e.g., in Norway. The consumer has little or no knowledge of where and how their clothes have been produced (Miller and Woodward 2011), and the authorities have not traditionally regulated the industry (Quantis 2018). At the same time, there is growing awareness that something must be done to prevent the industry from growing further and increasing its global footprint (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Nordic Council of Ministers [NCM] 2015).

Terms and concepts play a key role in environmental debates and policy-making. This article explores a concept of great relevance to the debate about clothing and the environment that can potentially form part of the solution: local clothing. As researchers based in Oslo, we wanted to see how Norwegian consumers understand this concept. The concept was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, it has had an effect on the development of more sustainable production (including home-based production) and sale of food. Local food enjoys political support both in Norway and other countries and contributes to greater diversity in forms of production and distribution, and greater interest in food culture (Fletcher and Vittersø 2018).

Secondly, the concept has also already been embraced by radical organizations and groups advocating for the sustainable development of clothing that rejects the growth paradigm in the circular economy. In a 2019 interview, Kate Fletcher, a leading scholar in the field of sustainability, design and fashion, stated that the only alternative system that entails real change is local production of clothing (Sorgenfrey 2019). Fletcher is a co-founder of the Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion, which works to change the system to achieve the actual goal of reducing climate and environmental impacts. Another important movement in sustainable fibre and dye production is Fibershed in California, which seeks to develop local value chains in the form of a network of producers within a geographical area. Fibershed has become a global phenomenon with local organizations in a number of countries, including Norway.

The data set comprises fifteen interviews with eighteen informants conducted in Western Norway. The interviews were part of the research project

KRUS, which is exploring how to improve utilization of Norwegian wool (Klepp and Tobiasson forthcoming; Klepp et al. 2019). The material provided many different insights into the informants' clothing habits, their understanding of their clothing and the concept of 'the local'. The informants were also asked the research questions from the present article: (1) what is local clothing? (2) In what ways is this deemed a more environmentally friendly alternative? These questions led the informants towards a way of thinking and use of concepts that were not necessarily their own, and they find the concept of local clothing vague. We have interpreted their responses to the questions in light of their clothing habits and approach to clothing in general, and call attention to the insufficient language about 'local clothing', a key term in the few alternatives to the clothing production system that currently dominates.

## LOCAL APPROACHES: FOOD AND CLOTHING

'Local' is not a term that is commonly used to discuss or describe clothing and is more familiar in the concept of 'local food' (Fletcher and Vittersø 2018). Local food can refer to food that is produced and sold in a specific geographical area, or locally sourced food. It contains references to history, traditions, small-scale production and quality. Local food can have different connotations, but what is important is that 'locally sourced' or just 'local' provide a language about food production through which production methods, distribution, quality and history can be discussed. In the last decade, labelling schemes, government initiatives and various organizations in Norway have helped to raise knowledge and awareness among producers and consumers about local origin (Vittersø et al. 2017). This is not the case when it comes to clothing. While food is included in political debate and awareness, clothing has as yet been excluded, despite the European Union announcing changes under its forthcoming textile policy (European Commission 2021).

Understanding local clothing as locally produced is entirely in line with our understanding of local food. However, the distinction between food and clothing is that textiles not only have a long value chain, but potentially also a long life with the consumer. Food is only eaten once. Although local food comprises foraging, home-based production and making food from scratch, local clothing comprises a longer period of the garment's life, with not only home-based production techniques such as knitting, but also care, repair, storage and alteration.

Fibershed argues that 'local' in this context means that the whole textile production value chain is situated within a specific geographical area. This coincides with the interpretation of local food in the EU Protected Food Name scheme in the form of geographical indications. Fibershed emphasizes the local, nature, country and culture, producers and consumers of the clothing within an area. Linking the production and use of dyes and fibres is a key element, and concerns 'connect[ing] the wearer to the fields' (Fibershed 2021: n.pag.). The organization collaborates with similar organizations in other countries and works to 'decentralize natural fibre and dye processes', 'empower grassroots stakeholders' and 'build prosperity in our rural communities and manufacturing system'. It seeks to make a region called 'Fibershed' self-sufficient in textiles and dyes produced in ways that improve and build soil and the future through regenerative agriculture.

Local clothing is also discussed in the report *Earth Logic: Fashion Action Research Plan* (Fletcher and Tham 2019). The background to these initiatives is

that the fashion industry's engagement in sustainability has not yet resulted in changes corresponding to the severity of our current climate and environmental challenges. The report describes 'progressive areas for transformation of the fashion sector directed at the whole system of fashion' (Fletcher and Tham 2019: 16). These areas coincide with the ideas behind Fibershed, and strengthening local networks, consumers and small-scale producers pervades the report.

This process of adaptation is localism and involves the shaping of an activity by a region's natural factors and by what is intriguing and dynamic in a place to ensure its long-term prosperity (Fletcher 2018). Localism favours the use of nearby resources, place-specific knowledge, community self-reliance. It gives expression to practices shaped by traditions, necessity, climate, imagination and a distributed form of authority, leadership and political power (Curtis 2003). Localism creates a sense of rooted identity and community, which energizes the work.

(Fletcher and Tham 2019: 40)

The term localism thus encompasses a broad range of actors, goals and work methods, but always within a specific geographical area, as is also the case for Fibershed. Mass production, global organization of production and concentrations of power in major corporations have no place in these objectives.

## **THE ADVANTAGES OF LOCAL PRODUCTION**

Local clothing has to some extent been discussed from a business perspective, with emphasis on reducing environmental impacts. Theyel (2012) shows how local production can generate business advantages such as reduced transport and more innovative environments, since proximity makes it easier to explore and integrate new processes and products. It can also be easier to respond to customers' wishes and manage changes in demand. Local collaboration can increase employment and become a competitive advantage. Dybdahl (2019) finds many of these advantages in local Norwegian textile businesses, including increased innovation, simpler coordination of transport, shorter delivery times and reduced costs related to customs and intermediaries. Production in step with sales reduces overproduction and storage costs. Locality was also used to expand business activities, among other things by opening a textile museum and organizing workshops for consumers at the factory. Dybdahl also points out that this kind of access to production facilities can create greater awareness of the clothing production industry, and, in turn, stimulate more sustainable consumer behaviour. DeLong et al. (2013) found more active relationships of this kind between consumers and products when interviewing clothing designers. This enabled them to work towards increasing product lifetimes, either through greater emotional attachment and quality or through sharing solutions and redesign.

## **TEXTILE PRODUCTION AND LOCAL CLOTHING IN NORWAY**

Norway is an oil-producing country. Oil is currently the most important raw material for textile production, yet it is exported rather than processed for the domestic textile industry. Wool has been produced for as long as people have lived in Norway, and features in traditional garments and handicraft techniques. It is processed by what is left of the Norwegian textile industry

after the bulk of production moved abroad in the second half of the twentieth century (Klepp and Laitala 2018). The value chain for Norwegian wool, from when the sheep are sheared until the wool becomes yarn, is: farm, sorting, classification, washing, carding and spinning. Of these processes, the first three steps take place in Norway, while washing of the raw wool mostly takes place in the United Kingdom, and spinning and further processing in Norway or other countries. This is followed by the production of the clothing itself by means of knitting, weaving and sewing, followed by various finishing treatments (Klepp et al. 2019). The long value chains for textiles are one of the reasons why Norwegian legislation does not require mandatory information about the country of origin (Vittersø et al. 2017).

Norwegian textile companies, not least spinning mills, have seen a positive development in recent years, both financially and in the form of increased use of Norwegian wool (Klepp et al. 2019). More knitters are becoming aware that wool produced in Norway from Norwegian raw wool is not only an opportunity but an attractive market consisting of many qualities, businesses and price categories. Norway has a rich tradition for local clothing culture in the form of knitted sweaters (Bøhn 1929), traditional Norwegian costumes called *bunad* affiliated to specific places and regions (Haugen 2006), and in the form of using appropriate outdoor clothing for the weather (Klepp and Tobiasson 2013). Many Norwegians participate in home-based production, repair and local circulation of clothing (Laitala and Klepp 2017, 2018; Laitala et al. 2021), but these terms are not combined into one overall term for local clothing that is appropriate to give the activities a common political and cultural focus on localism. As the informants will show, there is no obvious and general understanding of what local clothing is. Norway does not at present have a self-sufficiency strategy for clothing, as is the case for food (Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food 2016), nor any labelling schemes (Vittersø et al. 2017), but there are certain local political sustainability strategies on the consumption of textiles and other goods, including an increase in the repair, reuse and sale of second-hand clothing, clothes swapping and redesign that also include local production (Oslo Byråd 2019).

## METHODOLOGY

The data material comprises interviews conducted in Western Norway in 2016. Western Norway comprises Norway's second largest city Bergen and neighbouring municipalities. As in the rest of Norway, the area has strong textile traditions in the form of sheep farming and home-based production. Western Norway was strategically chosen as a case study because it represents the urban and rural dimension, and because there is some local textile production in the region. The sample is intended to represent a typical area of Norway, thus enabling the analysis to be used in wider contexts (Flyvbjerg 2006). The material comprises fifteen interviews with eighteen informants (see Table 1). The majority were women (67%) and the age span was 24–76 years (average age of 53). The informants were recruited through acquaintances of acquaintances, snowball sampling and through participants in the research project KRUS. The goal was to achieve a strong mix of informants with varying knowledge of textile production. Some of the informants had experience of textile trade, industrial production or handicrafts; others had little knowledge aside from buying, wearing and washing clothes. Together, they represent a diverse sample, including the degree to which they are 'interested in clothes'

Table 1: List of informants.

Interview No.	Informant No.	Pseudonym	Age	Gender
1	1	Heidi	42	Female
2	2	Brita	60	Female
3	3	Lars	32	Male
4	4	Linda	55	Female
	5	Eva	63	Female
5	6	Anne	76	Female
6	7	Anders	33	Male
7	8	Rita	69	Female
	9	Viktor	69	Male
8	10	Sara	38	Female
9	11	Reidun	75	Female
	12	Trygve	72	Male
10	13	Arne	52	Male
11	14	Unn	24	Female
12	15	Marianne	29	Female
13	16	Emma	36	Female
14	17	Karen	71	Female
15	18	Peter	57	Male

and their style and taste in clothing. The informants had very different financial situations and represented both the city centre and rural areas. The interviews lasted 1.5–2.5 hours and were recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms are used for the informants in the text below.

Fieldwork formed part of the large-scale collection of material that, combined, sheds light on the local clothing phenomenon. Most of the interviews took place in the informants' homes and the visits also included a wardrobe study (Fletcher and Klepp 2017; Klepp and Bjerck 2014), which involved exploring storage and equipment for clothing care and repair, and the informants showing us clothing they particularly associated with the three words *local*, *good* and *practical*.

The analysis builds on both direct and indirect questions about the concept 'local'. Indirectly, the questions included: 'Have you got any clothes that someone has made for you?'; 'Do you make clothes yourself?'; 'Do you have a sewing machine or other equipment for making or repairing clothes?'; and 'Have you got any clothes made of Norwegian wool?' Our (the researchers) definition of local is implicit in such questions, and we assume that local can encompass local raw materials, production, home-based production, clothing habits and individual garments. However, the informants' responses also provide knowledge, language and understandings of the same phenomena. All three keywords used in the wardrobe study elucidate the local, *good* and *practical* clothing, through their potential to be well-adapted to the climate and the person's life (locally) and the word *local* by demonstrating what the informants understand by the term. As such, we not only asked for an explanation but also to see examples.

At the same time as wanting to explore the informants' opinions about local clothing, we were also aware that it was not necessarily a concept they were familiar with. Since the analysis concerns understanding and language, it is important to distinguish between etic and emic perspectives (Miller and Deutsch 2009). As researchers, we have particularly taken an etic perspective in that we have a specific and external understanding of 'local clothing'. Since the informants were not necessarily familiar with the concept, it was even more important in the analysis to understand how they perceived it and to interpret their understanding of clothing and 'the local' from their unique perspectives. In this way, the analysis highlights different perspectives to improve understanding of the various aspects of local clothing.

The interviews were analysed using a thematic content analysis and understandings of local clothing were based on themes and patterns. The concepts that emerged were then defined, delimited and named.

## WHAT IS LOCAL CLOTHING?

The interviews revealed five different aspects of the local: production, place-specific garments, local clothing habits, home-based production and local circulation. The categories and how they emerged from the interview material are presented below.

### **Production**

One way in which the local is perceived is where products were made. This also forms the basis for policy and labelling schemes for food in Norway and the European Union. However, the issue is less straightforward when it comes to clothing.

We asked our informant Brita (60) to say the first thing that came to mind as 'local' or 'Norwegian'. Brita: 'I might think of *Norrøna*, but I don't know if they're [...] made here in Norway. But it's a Norwegian brand at least'. Brita points to two important aspects of what local clothing can be: where it is produced, and the brand and association with a country based on the owner, designer or marketer of the item. *Norrøna* is a well-known Norwegian sportswear brand. Its products are not produced in Norway and do not contain Norwegian raw materials. The brand is owned by Norwegian stakeholders and the products are designed in Norway and profiled through Norwegian polar heroes and well-known outdoor sports personalities. In other words, *Norrøna* is a '100 per cent' Norwegian brand, but does not involve local production.

Most of the informants had difficulty distinguishing between Norwegian companies, the use of Norwegian raw materials and production in Norway. This was also true of informants who had worked all their lives in the textile sector, such as Rita and Viktor (both 69). In the following, they discuss a company that produces Merino wool underwear. With few exceptions, Merino wool is a raw material that has never been produced in Norway. The company is based in the same city they have lived and worked in all their lives, and they have long experience as consumers of these products.

Rita: Janus thermal underwear for example must be made of Norwegian wool.

Viktor: Merino? I'm not sure if it's ...

Rita: Maybe it's not. But the kind you knit yourself? Home-knitted.

Viktor: I would think that's Norwegian. I would assume that.



1. We base this claim on both the interviews and our own experience through questions and comments at lectures on textiles in Norway.

Rita thinks the raw materials are Norwegian because the brand is Norwegian, while Viktor knows that Merino wool is not produced in Norway. It is a common assumption that raw materials are Norwegian if the brand is Norwegian.<sup>1</sup> Yarn made from Norwegian wool does exist, but does not dominate the market. Furthermore, there is no third-party certification, making it difficult to know whether the wool is Norwegian (Vittersø et al. 2017). Another informant, Unn (24), was conscious of her clothes consumption. She did not buy a lot of clothes due to environmental considerations. However, she also had very unclear perceptions of the relationship between raw materials and production, even when it came to two well-known factories in the neighbourhood.

Researcher: Do you have any Norwegian clothing – clothes produced in Norway?

Unn: No, that's hard to say – I suppose very little is produced in Norway. I think, well, if I had some of those Dale sweaters and things – that could be. But it might well be the case that those sweaters are produced in the Czech Republic or somewhere.

Researcher: Do you think you have any clothes made of Norwegian wool?

Unn: I think that would have to be something my grandma knitted. I don't know who produces Norwegian wool. Is that like Oleana? But I haven't got that. And Dale maybe.

Unn is knowledgeable about brands in the area where she lives, which could be defined as local, but she has no idea whether they use Norwegian raw materials and what is produced in Norway. Dale of Norway and Oleana are indeed Norwegian textile enterprises. Most of Dale's production takes place in Norway and it uses Norwegian wool for the coarser knitted sweaters in its range. All Oleana's textile production takes place just outside Bergen, but it did not use Norwegian wool at the time of the interview. Unn was aware that she did not know much about Norwegian clothing production, and her guesses were far from reality, with the possible exception of 'what grandma has knitted'.

We put the same question to Lars (32) about whether there is such a thing as local clothing:

Lars: No. Or there is, but I don't buy it. There's a shop out in Gågaten called Regn [...] that's a very sort of Bergen thing, and there's a designer in Skostredet called [...] I can't remember. He's very skilled.

Lars, in line with the other informants, points out brands and production, but not in relation to raw materials or where the product is produced, instead focusing on locally designed products and shops with a focus on design. Many of the informants knitted, but most did not know where the yarn was produced or where the raw wool came from. One informant who was concerned with local raw materials is Arne (52). He is a keen knitter and lives near a spinning mill where he gets most of his yarn. He also uses yarn made from local sheep's wool.

Arne: It's very important for me that it's local, so I've mostly used Hillesvåg. Because I like their yarn, especially the one called Pellsull, which I think is really nice. So I've knitted a bit with that. And I've knitted a bit with wild sheep wool. So I do feel that it should be local.



Arne's understanding of local is that the yarn he knits with comes from sheep in the area he lives in (wild sheep) and is spun at a local spinning mill.

The informants often associate local clothing with Norwegian companies, production in Norway and/or Norwegian design. However, they know little about the subject and assume that only a limited amount is locally produced. Their perception of raw materials was particularly unclear, with a lack of appropriate language potentially making this even more problematic. The informants had a clearer understanding of Norwegian brands. This is also highlighted in a report about origin labelling possibilities (Vittersø et al. 2017). Buying directly from the factory spotlights these factors, but it is otherwise difficult for consumers to gain insight into production.

### **Place-specific garments and local clothing habits**

Norwegian clothing culture is characterized by a diversity of clothing with place names. A *bunad* is not only a national costume, but refers to a specific place the wearer comes from and also encompasses the Sami people's traditional clothing. Many places also have knitting patterns either with a history from the region or that have been developed with that in mind. In both cases, the garments bear the place name (Klepp and Tobiasson 2018).

In a previous research, we have compared Norwegian and Swedish consumers' relationship with wool (Klepp et al. 2016). *Bunads* and knitted garments with local affiliation were found in both countries and were the first thing that came to the informants' minds when discussing local clothing (Klepp and Laitala 2018). *Bunads* and knitted sweaters are common in Norway. Two in three women and, approximately, one in five men own a *bunad*, with the latter on the increase (Klepp and Laitala 2016). The tradition of linking patterns to a place, and place names to knitting patterns, dates back to the 1920s and the book *Norske strikkemønstre* (Bøhn 1929). This has in more recent decades been reinforced by practices such as Dale's use of place names in its winter sports World Cup and Olympics sweaters (Klepp and Tobiasson 2018).

The informants closely associated local clothing with place-specific garments of this kind. This association was in fact so strong that the clothing was not necessarily considered local enough, either because the area it represented was too large or because they came from another place in the country and were thus not local to the informants.

Researcher: If I say local clothing, what comes to mind?

Arne: I would say, sort of a bunad kind of thing. But the Nordhordland bunad covers such a big area that it's not just from here. It's sort of, how many municipalities are there in Hordaland [county] – five or six – all of those would say it's their bunad. They vary slightly between inland and coastal areas, but are otherwise the same.

Researcher: But the sweaters, the one you got. Would you call that local?

Arne: I'd call that local. It's from Mure, which isn't far from here, so that's a local sweater.

The sweater alone represents an area that is small and close enough for Arne (52) to consider it local. Others also consider 'the local' to be a smaller geographical region. In the interview with husband and wife Trygve (72) and Reidun (75), we find that the size of this geographical area can vary. Trygve: 'The bunad is our national costume. It's the most beautiful thing we have.

Then there's the *Vossatrøye*. That's a local Western Norwegian phenomenon'. Reidun and her children and grandchildren have Nordhordland costumes. Trygve, however, says:

I have the same as the Crown Prince, because I'm from Fana. Originally from Fana, so that's the way it is. Not because it's higher status because he has it, but because of the bunad culture thing. Most people want to find something they have a sense of belonging to.

These informants do not live in Fana. They both feel that the *bunad* is both local in the sense of representing a small geographical area in which they or their family live, and national in the sense of being the most beautiful thing they have, the same as the Crown Prince wears, and the attire the whole family wears on Norway's Constitution Day and other special occasions.

We wanted to know whether the knitted sweaters with place names that originate from different areas of Norway were also perceived in the same way.

Researcher: Do you think there's any difference between Setesdal and Fana since Fana's here in Western Norway and Setesdal is not? Or is it just a pattern and a name? Does it matter that the pattern is from somewhere else?

Reidun: I suppose it didn't, but it's become, today, I feel that, I've knitted the Setesdal sweater for my grandchildren, but I feel that Fana and Voss are a bit closer to us.

Reidun thinks the sweaters have a certain affiliation to specific regions of Norway, but that this did not mean that you should not knit them for someone without that affiliation, as many people feel is the case with *bunads*. However, when using yarn from her own or neighbouring farms, she also chooses local designs. The raw materials, motif and production are thus situated within a geographical area that is smaller than a municipality. The size of the geographical area considered 'local' and 'locally sourced' can vary from product to product, and in time, when it comes to both food and clothing. However, there is another aspect of clothing to consider. Some clothing requires that you are from the place, or at least that you can claim some sort of affiliation to it, to be a rightful wearer. This applies more to *bunads* than knitted sweaters and varies between places and people. However, it is not to our knowledge an issue when it comes to food. You do not have to come from Vik to eat the special *Gamalost fra Vik* cheese that comes from the area.

Most of the informants associate *bunads* with both *local* and *Norwegian*. However, our informant Emma (36) has a number of difficulties with this. When asked about local clothing, she answers:

You're probably expecting me to say bunad. That's definitely Norwegian, but maybe, I don't know that much about it. But I suspect that the bunad tradition as it's been lately has been developed more recently. Originally, it was work clothing and smart clothing for Norwegians, dating far back. It's been so ridiculously adapted, so I suspect that it's my rebellious worker's soul that I inherited from mum [...] because a bunad is a symbol of those who had money, and it's probably still a bit like that since not everyone has NOK 40,000 to spend on a dress that you wear 2–3 times a year.

Emma thinks class is important. *Bunads* are not so much a tradition among ordinary people but of the upper class in rural areas. They also remain expensive garments (Klepp 2016). She also points out that many *bunads* have been reconstructed in more recent times and lack the long history, Emma believes they should have to be 'local clothing'. Emma's point is key: the local is not only related to place but also to social inequality, traditions and historical roots.

*Bunads*, and to some degree also knitted sweaters, are clothing with a special status in people's wardrobes, but what otherwise characterizes clothing where they live? The answer was clothes made to keep you dry. Rubber boots, waterproofs and sou'westers were originally developed for fishermen and seamen (Rasch 1999), but are used today by children and adults alike in connection with outdoor activities. Lars (32) explains: 'Waterproof jackets are typically Bergen and very popular here at the moment'. The informants also gave waterproof clothing as an example of local clothing, but *bunads* and knitwear were still perceived as more local than other garments. The informants were less used to the idea of local clothing being the way people dress in a place. Particularly in the case of *bunads*, there were discussions and an awareness of the relationship between the wearer, the place and the history, where both the garment and wearer's affiliation to the place, and the size of the place, were important. In other words, we have a rich language for talking about *bunads* and associated traditions and norms in society.

### **Home-based production and local circulation**

In addition to buying clothing, consumption also includes use and disposal (Laitala et al. 2018). Clothes can be made at home and be repaired, altered and shared in different ways. This is discussed under concepts such as 'prosumption' (a mix of production and consumption) and DIY clothing (Fox 2014). Norway differs from countries such as Sweden and the United Kingdom in that Norwegians make and repair more clothes (Klepp and Tobiasson 2021; Laitala and Klepp 2018).

The informants consider home-made clothing to be local. They are often made of materials that are, or at least can be, locally sourced. Norway had a great deal of home-made clothing not that long ago, during many of the informants' childhoods. The following quote from Anne (76) is taken from a long story about a jacket sewn by her mother-in-law: 'spinning and setting up the loom and things, that's what they did in winter, you see. And they had sheep, so it was [...] there was no money involved other than for fulling and dyeing'. This work took a great deal of time, and not least required knowledge of a number of processes and techniques. It formed part of another kind of economic system that took place with 'no money involved', as Anne put it. Home-based production, starting with your own sheep and culminating in the finished garments, still takes place today, often by renting wool processing services to prepare the yarn and then using the simpler technique of knitting. Knitting is the most common technique among the informants and the population at large. According to Laitala and Klepp (2018), 48% of Norwegian women knit and it is also common to repair clothes at home. Forty-one per cent of Norwegian consumers have repaired or had clothes altered in the past two years and 72% of these activities took place privately (Laitala et al. 2021).

Surprisingly, the environmentally conscious Unn (24) was the only informant who did not repair clothes, but said, 'it would be a bit cool to be able to do that. It'll have to be a project at some point'. She had just been to her mother's home to get name tags sewn into her clothes, and did not own a

needle or thread herself. As seen in our quantitative studies (Laitala and Klepp 2018), the alternative to repairing clothing yourself is to get help privately, as Unn does. Clothing is cared for and worn locally, regardless of where and how it is produced. The long lifetime of clothing and the extensive efforts involved in washing and otherwise caring for it characterizes our garments and our relationship to them. This is clearly seen in repair, adjusting and altering, since they actively contribute to extending clothing lifespan. However, the same applies to washing. Interest in these aspects of our relationship to clothing is increasing, not least as part of a shift towards sustainability (Klepp and Tobiasson 2021), which Unn also touched on.

## **LOCAL AS SUSTAINABLE**

With the exception of *bunads* and knitted sweaters, the informants lack a clear definition of what local clothing is. Local production is also an ambiguous term. The informants shift between perceiving it as a brand and design, and as production and raw materials. It is thus understandable that they associate local clothing or locally produced clothing, with an environmental perspective. There are nonetheless grounds for such a view, and we will now look at what aspects of local clothing they felt could reduce environmental impacts.

### ***Less transport***

Transport is often considered one of the greatest contributors in debates on climate and environmental impact. However, transport often comprises a small part of life cycle assessments (Allwood et al. 2006). Transport is extensive in the clothing industry, with garments often travelling several times around the world before reaching the consumer. This includes second-hand clothing. ‘Locally sourced’ is an important term used in connection with food that has not been transported long distances before being consumed, and although uncommon, the term can also be used for clothing.

Transport is also one of the first things our informants think of when we ask why local clothing could be a better alternative for the environment. As Heidi (42) points out: ‘I think about the environmental aspects of transport costs, that that could be good. Or, I mean, not the costs in that way, but environmental costs’. Heidi is not alone in this line of thinking. Transport is a more visible part of the costs of global value chains. A garment’s journey is often visible on the label showing the country of origin, often in Asia.

### ***Stricter regulation***

Norway, in line with other western countries, has stricter environmental requirements and regulation of animal welfare and labour rights and safety than the countries in which clothing production often takes place. With the example of the factory accident in Bangladesh in 2013, this topic has been prominent in the Norwegian media in recent years (Burke 2013).

Several of the informants emphasized good working conditions as an advantage of local production.

Unn: It’s good when it’s produced in Norway since you know they’ve had good working conditions, while when it’s produced in Bangladesh or somewhere like that, you have no insight. And it’s probably taken place there because the conditions are poorer and production cheaper.

Unn feels that moving production abroad is not only about lower wages but also less regulation of environmental factors. Stricter regulation of goods is more important for clothing than for food. She believes there are 'bigger differences between clothes produced in Norway and clothes produced abroad than food production. I don't think there are such terrible conditions linked to that'. Unn is correct in this assumption. Norway has, for instance, no rules concerning the import of genetically modified cotton clothing, but strict rules for genetically modified food. Similarly, there is strict control of chemicals in food, but not to the same extent in clothing, which can, in turn, affect working conditions during production. The long value chain and the authorities' lack of interest in regulation indicates that it is more difficult to achieve transparency in the value chains and provide reliable information to consumers. Locally produced clothing, however, must be produced in accordance with Norwegian ethics and environmental rules.

### ***Products adapted to local conditions***

The weather and climate, culture, customs and clothing habits vary geographically. Western Norway is characterized by lots of rain, steep mountains and, as in the rest of Norway, importance is attached to dressing according to the weather and enjoying outdoor life.

The informants demonstrate several reasons for preferring local clothing, including quality. Rita and Viktor prefer Norwegian products:

Viktor: At least when it comes to sportswear. Because we see that differently – we dress to protect ourselves. Sportswear in Mid and Southern Europe don't need to meet the same standards because the weather there isn't as extreme as here. You can see that in buttons and zips, the size of hoods, that sort of thing. Norwegian products are much better than many others in that respect.

The clothes are basically considered better because they are better suited to Norwegian conditions. However, this was different for other types of clothing. 'No, I think a Southern European cut is smarter. They take a different approach to clothes than in Norway. More elegant.' Viktor thus points out geographical and cultural differences that influence the products and chooses clothing based on this variation, in the same way as others buy wine or ham with a regional/national character. Whether this can be seen as an environmental advantage depends on our perception of environmental issues. Technically well-made and socially durable clothing has a longer lifetime (Laitala et al. 2018) and will therefore be worn more. It is feasible that local clothing is better adapted to our bodies, the weather, our lives and other aspects of our culture, thereby potentially functioning better. However, it is unknown whether locally produced clothing and clothing made from local materials are actually used for longer.

As the informants see it, good utilization of resources, contact and dissemination of knowledge are other positive aspects of local production and local products. Improvement through all parts of the value chain provide opportunities to utilize local resources. Unn uses this to argue for Norwegian wool: 'Because it's good that we can use the resources available in Norway, including when it comes to textiles'. Better resource utilization is thus an argument for local production, which is closely related to better cooperation along the

value chain. Global mass production does not take heed of geographical variation in the climate, our bodies and our day-to-day lives. Low-price clothing is precisely a result of a mass market consisting of the same goods being sold around the world.

### PROMOTING LOCAL CLOTHING

We have demonstrated the many different ways in which the informants understand local clothing. This includes locally produced clothing, or at least where some raw materials or processing takes place in Norway, Norwegian brands and design, garments linked to a specific place, or the way in which clothes are used, cared for, altered and shared. There are thus different understandings of what the term 'local clothing' entails, where garments such as *bunads* and knitted sweaters and jackets are most often linked to a place, while only in the case of *bunads* was there considered to be a requirement on place affiliation to be a rightful wearer.

There is increasing attention on the impact of clothing production on the environment, which affects our relationship with the clothes we buy and wear, as well as how we dispose of them. The informants highlighted several aspects of local production that can contribute to reducing environmental impacts, such as shorter transport distances and stricter regulation of production. It is also plausible that the products are better adapted to our climate, culture and clothing habits, and that they are better cared for due to a stronger, more personal relationship with them. Although the term in itself is not used, this encompasses forms of production and products that the informants perceive to have lower environmental impacts in line with previous literature on local production.

The clothing that generates the strongest feelings is without a doubt the *bunad*, and there are long traditions of wearing this costume in connection with public protests and political mobilization. This was most recently seen in autumn 2021 when one of the authors of this article criticized the European Union's work on the labelling scheme Product Environmental Footprint for favouring fossil-based mass production and thereby threatening nature-based handicraft products such as the *bunad*. This created massive media interest and also resulted in questions being asked in the Norwegian Parliament. Although 'local clothing' does not exist as a concept, it is clothing that is worth fighting for.

As described in the introduction, trendsetting environments working for a more radical shift in fashion, fibre and dye systems emphasize local clothing as an important alternative to the current global production. The concept has a weak position in public policy and in the informants' language. Knitting is the most common form of local production. Home-knitted garments are considered local, yet the knitting itself is not a phenomenon associated with the term 'local'. The phenomenon must be put into words to take the leap from knitting to understanding 'the local' as an alternative and giving it political meaning. In the same way as 'making food from scratch' generates meaning and has an impact on local food, local clothing needs a language to describe the diverse production process. One possible contribution to such a development is to introduce a country-of-origin labelling scheme for clothing that includes more than just an indication of one country in which the final process took place. Such a scheme could instead provide information about where the garment was designed and the brand owned, where the raw materials were sourced

and processed, and where it was knitted or sewn. We can demand transparency throughout the value chain to identify ethical and environmental issues. Such transparency could be statutory and enhance awareness of the relationship between place and product.

It is time to bring more attention to clothing when it comes to both physical qualities and forms of production, and to developing policy guidelines that enable us to know what a garment is actually made of and how and where it was produced. This can lead to a richer language in the public sphere to describe clothing that enables debate on alternatives and change. Talking about and promoting local clothing as an alternative is possibly one of the most important methods of creating alternatives for the general public and in policy.

The interviews in this study were conducted before the COVID-19 outbreak. One of many consequences of the pandemic was greater focus on local production, including clothing, due to shortages of face masks and infection control equipment. The relationship between emergency preparedness and local production became clearer. A political prioritization of local clothing, including production, care and varied forms of use, could enhance the development of language and awareness. 'The local' confers that the clothing system is not only about production, but that the consumer also plays an important role through the way in which they care for, alter, store, combine and give garments and outfits meaning. Local can thus become a way in which to emphasize the users of the clothing themselves, rather than production and disposal, which dominate our current understanding of clothing and the policy instruments. We are all clothing consumers. Local clothing can thus make our understanding of clothing more democratic and our production more diverse.

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