ACHIEVING A SUSTAINABLE FASHION INDUSTRY THROUGH GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS & STANDARDIZED MEASUREMENT TOOLS – AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY ON THE SUSTAINABLE APPAREL COALITION

Thesis for Master, 30 ECTS
Textile Management
Sofia Cederfeldt

2018.5.07
Title: Achieving a Sustainable Fashion Industry through Global Collaborations and Standardized Measurement Tools – An Exploratory Case Study on the Sustainable Apparel Coalition

Publication year: 2018

Thesis Number: 2018.5.07

Author: Sofia Cederfeldt

Supervisor: Jonas Larsson

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the respondents for taking their time to participate in this study and making it possible. By sharing their insights and knowledge with me, I gained entirely new perspectives and ideas, and further motivation for my future career, thank you. Further I would like to thank Jonas Larsson for sharing the idea of this thesis with me and for his support and guidance throughout this process. I would also like to thank my family and friends for their patience and understanding during these last six months. Without their support, it would have been impossible to fulfil this thesis.

Sincerely,

Sofia Cederfeldt

August 15th 2018, Gothenburg
ABSTRACT

**Background:** The increased attention to the subject of sustainable development within the fashion industry is frequently explained by how the fashion industry has become global, connecting brands, producers, manufacturers, businesses, and consumers across the entire globe. This has further led to the need for new constellations of global multi stakeholder collaborations. In 2009, a rather remarkable collaboration was announced; Patagonia and Walmart are pairing up to fight for a sustainable apparel, footwear, and textile industry. The collaboration is called The Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) and is today representing nearly half of the entire volume of global production for apparel and footwear.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to identify key decision points and actions in the development of SAC and the Higg Index. The aim is to understand how to create a foundation for sustainable development within the fashion, apparel and textile industry on a global scale.

**Methodology:** The research has been conducted through an exploratory case study of qualitative character, focusing on the development process of SAC and the Higg Index. The data has been collected through in-depth interviews with participants having prior knowledge, insight, participation, and experience of the development process of SAC and the Higg Index. Further the data has been analyzed through an inductive thematic analysis.

**Result & Analysis:** Several interesting themes arrived in the result. However, these were narrowed down to four key factors for the development process of SAC and the Higg Index; Industry collaboration through democratic organizational culture, Getting the right people on the bus, then teaching them how to drive it, Trustworthy standards, communication and transparency throughout the supply chain, and Striving for global sustainable development = good for business.

**Research Limitations & Suggestions for Future Research:** Due to the exploratory character of the study, conclusions have been drawn with caution and has rather aimed to focus on the contribution of new insights, a deeper understanding and increased knowledge of the development of SAC and the Higg Index. The main suggestion for future research is to conduct a study which includes the perspective of the manufacturers and workers within the supply chain. This type of study could assist with gaining further insights of obstacles and potential solutions for how to globally adopt the Higg Index within all levels of the supply chain in the most successful way.

**KEYWORDS:** Fashion Industry, Higg Index, Collaborations, Standardized Measurement Tools, Sustainability, Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), Sustainable Development, Supply Chain.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION .......................................................................................................................... - 1 -
   1.1 Background ......................................................................................................................... - 1 -
   1.2 Discussion of Problem ........................................................................................................ - 4 -
   1.3 Purpose and Contribution of Study .................................................................................... - 5 -
   1.4 Previous Research & Motivation for Study .......................................................................... - 6 -
   1.5 Case Study ........................................................................................................................... - 9 -
      1.5.1 The Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) ..................................................................... - 9 -
      1.5.2 The Higg Index .............................................................................................................. - 11 -

2 METHODOLOGY ....................................................................................................................... - 15 -
   2.1 Research Strategy & Design ............................................................................................... - 15 -
      2.1.1 Exploratory Case Study on the SAC ................................................................. - 16 -
   2.2 Research Method ................................................................................................................ - 17 -
      2.2.1 Semi-structured In-depth Interviews ........................................................................... - 18 -
         2.2.1.1 Skype & Telephone Interviews ............................................................................ - 19 -
      2.2.2 Transcription and Process of Collected Data ............................................................. - 20 -
      2.2.3 Sampling ...................................................................................................................... - 20 -
         2.2.3.1 Participants ............................................................................................................ - 21 -
   2.3 Data Analysis Method ......................................................................................................... - 23 -
      2.3.1 Inductive Thematic Analysis ....................................................................................... - 23 -
   2.4 Data Quality ......................................................................................................................... - 32 -
      2.4.1 Credibility .................................................................................................................... - 32 -
      2.4.2 Transferability .............................................................................................................. - 33 -
      2.4.3 Dependability ................................................................................................................ - 33 -
      2.4.4 Confirmability .............................................................................................................. - 34 -

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ................................................................................................. - 35 -
   3.1 Collaborative Organizational Culture .................................................................................. - 35 -
      3.1.1 Multi Stakeholder Collaborations ............................................................................... - 36 -
      3.1.2 The Right Key Players ............................................................................................... - 37 -
      3.1.3 The Equal Partnership ................................................................................................. - 39 -
      3.1.4 Trust ............................................................................................................................. - 40 -
   3.2 Connecting Sustainable Development with the Global Fashion Industry ............................. - 41 -
      3.2.1 Sustainable Development = Added Business Value ................................................... - 42 -
   3.3 Sustainable Supply Chain Management in the Fashion, Apparel & Textile Industry ......... - 44 -
      3.3.1 Standards ..................................................................................................................... - 47 -
      3.3.2 Transparency ............................................................................................................... - 49 -

4 RESULT & ANALYSIS ............................................................................................................... - 52 -
   4.1 Presentation of Identified Themes ....................................................................................... - 52 -
   4.2 How it all started (with OIA) .............................................................................................. - 54 -
      4.2.1 Getting the Right People on the Bus ............................................................................. - 54 -
      4.2.2 Getting the Right People on the Bus in the right seats .................................................... - 60 -
   4.3 Collaborative Organizational Culture .................................................................................. - 62 -
      4.3.1 Getting the Right People on the Bus in the Right Seats then teaching them how to drive it. - 62 -
      4.3.2 Industry Collaboration through Democratic Organizational Culture .......................... - 64 -
         4.3.2.1 Learning How to Collaborate with Your Competitors ............................................ - 67 -
         4.3.2.2 An Equal Partnership ............................................................................................ - 69 -
   4.4 Striving for Global Sustainable Development ..................................................................... - 71 -
      4.4.1 = Good for Business ...................................................................................................... - 71 -
   4.5 The Fashion, Apparel and Textile Supply Chain ................................................................. - 76 -
      4.5.1 The Impact of Production ............................................................................................. - 76 -
      4.5.2 The Need for Harmonization ....................................................................................... - 77 -
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - The Coalition Stakeholders ................................................................. - 10 -
Figure 2 - The Higg Index ...................................................................................... - 11 -
Figure 3 - Interview Participants ......................................................................... - 22 -
Figure 4 - Presentation of Respondents .................................................................. - 22 -
Figure 5 - Ambitions for a New Textiles Economy ................................................ - 47 -
Figure 6 - Identified Themes via Interviews .............................................................. - 53 -
Figure 7 - Identified Themes via Interviews 2.0 ...................................................... - 54 -
Figure 8 - Environmental Impact Score ................................................................... - 85 -
1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces a background highlighting the relevance of both theoretical, societal, and contextual perspectives which are all considered important and closely related to the topic of this study. It goes on describing the discussion of problem which leads to the purpose of the study. Further it accounts for the initiative behind this study, for whom it is relevant for and to which industry it applies. It further highlights previous research as an additional motivation for this thesis, and last it contains a description of the case study, introducing the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) and the Higg Index. The aim with this chapter is to provide the reader with a profound background to the study, and hopefully a deeper understanding of its importance.

1.1 Background

Over the last decade a shift within the fashion industry can be witnessed. A shift which can be identified among consumers, companies, organizations, and even through unexpected collaborations. The rise of the ethical consumer is a constant ongoing discussion which has resulted in former fast fashion companies rebranding themselves with the help of conscious collections and progressive marketing campaigns. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are brought to attention both in fashion educational programs, as well as on fashion companies’ websites identifying how to implement the SDGs in their business models. The fashion industry’s obvious connection to the subject of sustainability can no longer be ignored. This acknowledged connection has further resulted in a rather remarkable announcement; In 2009 Patagonia and Walmart decided to pair up to fight for a sustainable apparel, footwear, and textile industry (Apparel Coalition 2018). The shift is inevitable for anyone to avoid.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines sustainable development as the following “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987). Studies show how the consumer interest and awareness about sustainable development has increased in general over the last decade putting pressure on companies, notably also within the fashion industry. There are several factors explaining the increased attention to the subject of sustainable development within the fashion industry. Kaiser (2012) refers to how the fashion industry has become global, connecting brands,
producers, manufacturers, businesses, and consumers across our globe, which is why Ekström (2015) emphasizes how it has become an industry almost impossible for anyone to abstain from. The latest confirmation of the fashion industry’s relevance in relation to environmental issues and sustainable development, is the most recent published report by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) *A new textiles economy*. The authors discuss what impact the fashion, apparel and textile industry, mainly over the last twenty years, has had on our environment, and emphasize the need for transparency and a circular fashion economy. Young, Jirousek, and Ashdown (2004) confirm this need, and describe the rethinking of the design process as a key decision point on how to improve the level of sustainability in all stages, caring for both environmental and human resources. Meanwhile 98 million tons of nonrenewable resources are being used for production each year (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The negative trend of increased use of natural resources in economic processes is continuing worldwide according to the Report of the Secretary-General (2017).

The fast-fashion phenomenon has further led to an increased production pace and usually because of that; decreased working conditions, poor fabric qualities, and ignorance of environmental and social responsibility throughout the entire manufacturing, production (pre and post), and transportation process, mainly abusing resources in third world countries (Ekström 2015; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Kaiser 2012).

These are all present issues of today, existing despite of the increased amount of attention to the subject of sustainable development, along with the many initiatives working for improvements. However, lately a greater focus has been placed on multinational companies, and the responsibility they hold in this debate. In the report *Our Common Future* by WCED (1987), it highlights how these types of companies play a key role for sustainable development, referring to their common engagement of production in developing countries. The report further emphasizes the need for action regarding strengthened negotiation capacity with developing countries, and transnationals, as a way to secure terms which respect their environmental concerns and resources. For a real change to happen within the fashion apparel industry, brands must take their part of the responsibility to produce, and sell, sustainable clothing (Poldner 2013). Transparency throughout the supply chain has been described as a crucial way of taking action to achieve this.

During 2018 sustainability is predicted to become the center of innovation in the fashion industry, with leading companies raising the bar for fellow stakeholders to follow (Bof 2018).
In an interview with H&M’s CEO Karl-Johan Persson, he says "In order to remain a successful business, we need to keep growing and at the same time respect the planetary boundaries." (H&M 2014). He further refers to action plans including a collaborative mindset between competitors, a circular fashion economy, and the need for transparency throughout the entire supply chain, mentioning H&M’s engagement with the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), and their vision for the utilization and development of the Higg Index (H&M 2014). Already in 1998, Elkington was emphasizing the need for new forms of symbiosis, and collaborations as a way to succeed with the triple bottom line performance (including social, environmental, and financial responsibilities). Today, these types of collaborations are becoming more common than rare. Elmuti and Kathawala (2001) specifically emphasize how strategic alliances are a great part of the global economy. Elkington (1998) underlines the importance of creating platforms where common goals can be set, and where improved efficiency and results would not be possible to reach without these types of partnerships. Due to the many evidences pointing at the fashion industry for contributing to environmental pollution, and degradation in general, and due to the industry’s increasing understanding for this problem, and will of reducing its impact, leaders within the apparel and footwear industries has joined to form SAC (Radhakrishnan 2015). SAC is a collaborative organization bringing manufacturers, brands, and retailers within the textile industry together, all working for sustainable development (Patagonia 2018) with the vision of an industry that produces no unnecessary environmental harm, while contributing with a positive impact on both the people and communities associated with its activities (Apparel Coalition 2018a). The increased awareness, and scientific understanding for the expansion of both environmental and social issues occurring within the supply chains of the fashion industry has led stakeholders to develop a great variety of standards and measurements of social and environmental impact within their supply chains (Radhakrishnan 2015). Nike’s Apparel Environmental Design Tool (Nike 2010), and the Outdoor Industry Association’s Eco Index (OIA 2010) were two of the first prominent tools, which later evolved into what today is SAC’s Higg Index (Apparel Coalition 2018). The Higg Index is described as a set of standardized supply chain measurement tools for all industry participants, with the aim to improve the level of sustainability in all steps of the supply chain (Apparel Coalition 2018). The tools are divided into three subgroups including Facility Tools, Brand Tools and Product Tools, these will be further explained and illustrated for in chapter 1.5.2.
1.2 Discussion of Problem

An increasing environmental concern for the fashion industry is a fact, where the root to the problem to a large extent seems to be found within the supply chains where both social and environmental abuse has been discussed more frequently over the last decade (Kozar & Hiller Connell 2013; Radhakrishnan 2015). According to Sweeny (2015), globalization and the constant search for the cheapest labor rates are key factors contributing to short term solutions, and compromised supply chains. After much negative attention being drawn to the fashion industry lately, mainly through revealing documentaries, and articles exposing the truth behind this multimillion dollar industry, a new focus on improving standards within the supply chains seems to have spread among companies within the industry (Kozar & Hiller Connell 2013). The authors refer to decision points of having implemented global initiatives and adapted business models to focus on codes of conducts, the monitoring of factories, and educational programs supporting the worker’s right to fair wage, fair working conditions, and the right to collective bargaining. Kozar and Hiller Connell (2013) highlight how the negative attention has led to an industry unanimous acknowledgement of an increased need for the monitoring of producers, to assure compliance with social and environmental standards. Similarly, Blissick, Dickson, Silverman and Cao (2017) highlight the establishment of an unspoken consensus among stakeholders within the industry, referring to their increased expectations of brand’s, and retailer’s environmental performances as a result of the attention to the area. The authors refer to this as a development of what since the 1990’s, to a greater extent, used to be focused on sustainable performance limited to social and labor-related issues, excluding environmental-related ones. Due to the increased demand for sustainability initiatives throughout the supply chain, Gereffi and Frederick (2010) emphasize that only the brands who are willing to compete on a transparent level are the ones to count with in the future, referring to commitment to transparency as a key decision point.

However, the variation of brand’s individual standards and measurement tools are many, resulting in an expanded workload for all stakeholders within the industry being forced to increase resources or deepening their own knowledge of environmental impact within the supply chain. Young, Jirousek, and Ashdown (2004) further explain the need for assisting suppliers in implementing specific systems to compile with the brand’s standards for the suppliers to stand a chance of improvement. A key reason for this being how the globalized fashion industry has resulted in suppliers catering for brands across the world (Gereffi &
Frederick 2010). Further, the demand for the lowest labor rates at best product quality often equals materials being sourced outside of the factory country, adding up to an extended supply chain including additional intermediaries increasing the complication of a fully transparent and united supply chain (Sweeny 2015; Wolf 2011). The aim of SAC, to collectively develop a common measurement tool for the industry to use might seem as the obvious solution to the problem in theory, but what key actions and decision points are necessary to put this work into practice? Radhakrishnan (2015) underlines the need for a trustworthy way to assess the supply chains, and further the need for a trustworthy way to communicate the sustainability score to consumers. Yet Poldner (2013) questions SAC’s ability of doing so, criticizing their continued ability to remain a collaborative global organization striving for one common goal and by that achieving industry change, referring to the risk of member companies prioritizing their individual interests over the coalition’s common ones. Further, the Higg Index ability to become globally implemented has been expressed as a challenge by the fact that it originates from American and European brands, questioned to be taking governmental legislation in development countries (where many factories are situated) into consideration (Poldner 2013; Radhakrishnan 2015). Yet over 10 000 manufacturers were reported as utilizers of the Higg Index in 2017 (Apparel Coalition 2018b), raising an interest for how this development happened. The continuous need for compliance of sustainability standards is being emphasized, and Böhringer and Jochem (2007) underline how “an issue that cannot be clearly measured will be difficult to improve”. They emphasize how the identification of operational indicators is the first step towards sustainable development, while referring to industry alliance and collaboration as the key to succeed. With SAC members accounting for 60% of global sales within the textile industry (Poldner 2013), deriving from the unlikely partnership between Walmart and Patagonia, it might be possible that this global alliance of network is on to something. If SAC have the possibility to drive sustainable development within the fashion industry, it would be essential to find out what the key for succeeding with this establishment is.

1.3 Purpose and Contribution of Study

The purpose of this research is to identify key decision points and actions in the development of SAC and the Higg Index. The aim is to understand how to create a foundation for sustainable development within the fashion, apparel and textile industry on a global scale.
The initiative behind this study was brought forward by Rick Ridgeway, Vice President of Environmental Initiatives at Patagonia, as well as initiator and co-founder of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC). The motivation for the initiative of the study being to fill the knowledge gap about the development process of SAC, creating a deeper understanding and knowledge about SAC, the Higg Index, and on how this initiative can contribute with a foundation for global sustainable impact in the fashion, apparel and textile industry. Rather than testing existing theory, the contribution of the study is to create an understanding for the road map of the organization’s development, enabling for identification of successful as well as less successful decisions and actions throughout the development process of SAC. This study aims to provide with knowledge valuable for members of the Coalition, allowing them to clearly identify the main reasons behind the Coalition’s success as well as their existing challenges. Further this study aims to provide with a deeper understanding and knowledge valuable for stakeholders within the fashion, apparel and textile industry, as well as other industry stakeholders interested in the creation of a foundation for sustainable development through industry collaboration.

1.4 Previous Research & Motivation for Study

In 1999, Dickson was measuring consumer attitudes and behaviors towards social issues within the apparel industry, focusing on measuring the concern and potential actions for consumers to take. Several scholars have identified a knowledge-attitude-behavior gap concerning sustainability in general, however much research has remained consumer focused (Carrigan & Attalla 2001; Connell 2010; Dickson 1999; Kozar & Hiller Connell 2013). In 2008, Seuring and Muller conducted a literature review on sustainable supply chain management including 191 analyzed papers published between 1994 and 2007. The authors concluded that there is a clear absence of papers including the Triple Bottom Line approach of sustainability when examining supply chains. They underlined the common ways of reducing sustainable development to a one-dimensional environmental approach, and how social issues must be interrelated along with the three dimensions when discussing sustainability. Further they highlight the increasing need for cooperation among collaborating companies in the sustainable supply chain. Later, in the book *Social Responsibility in the Global Apparel Industry* by Dickson, Eckman and Loker (2009), the authors outline a broad perspective on
the global apparel industry, emphasizing how to implement social responsibility throughout the entire global supply chain.

There has been one study published by Berkeley-Haas in 2012 (Kester & Ledyard 2012), which focused on identifying the structure of SAC along with mapping the early development process of the organization through data collection via interviews held with SAC representatives. However, many developments within the organization, and of the tools in the Higg Index (in the Berkeley-Haas study referred to by its old name, Sustainable Apparel Index) has been made since then. Therefore, this study will to a large extent differ, and further contribute with identification of new areas of knowledge concerning SAC and the Higg Index. However, there has been a study rather similar to this one, by Poldner (2013). She too conducted in-depth interviews with SAC coalition members and industry experts, aiming to establish whether the competitiveness between coalition members would be affected by the density in between them. Poldner (2013) questioned whether the alliance really is as transparent and collaborative as they are claimed to be. The author further led with presenting a critical perception of the organization’s ability of continued success to drive change through collaboration in a network as broad as the one operating within SAC (taking into account that this was five years ago). However, Poldner (2013) eventually concluded that SAC has achieved in creating a collaborative network in a way that has never been done before. Further the author arrived at the conclusion of how the competitive impact in between members only seems to decrease through the density in between them. What needs to be emphasized however, is how this study was published in 2013, only 3 years after the official launch of SAC as a legal entity. Similarly, to the Berkeley-Haas study in 2012, much has happened thereafter. The organization has grown tremendously with an increased amount of coalition members, and utilizers of the Higg Index, which further has been developed in several aspects, motivating the need for an updated study examining SAC and the Higg Index in its contemporary situation. Further this study will aim to identify the different voices and opinions of the coalition members in a sense which has not been done before.

In addition to these two studies, Radhakrishnan (2015) published a chapter in the book Roadmap to Sustainable Textiles and Clothing (Muthu 2015), accounting for the increased consumer demand of green products, and thereby the increased range of different LCA tools. The author briefly describes the motivation behind SAC and in a descriptive way accounts for the variation of tools in the Higg Index, what they assess and how the working groups within
the different tools operate. Although this article clearly lays focus on the Higg Index and SAC, the spotlight is placed on the technical parts of the tools, how these have developed and what challenges they have faced during this process. Despite the article providing with substantial information about the core idea of the organization and further of its tools, it is rather a description accounting for all tools in the Higg Index (available at that present time being 2015), and how to develop these to overcome the technical challenges they faced during this time, further comparing a broad variation of LCA tools.

In more recent years, there has been two studies conducted were the researchers utilized parts of the tools included in the Higg Index (Islam & Khan 2014; Kim, Yun, Park & Park 2015), both with product focus. In 2016, Kozar and Hiller Connell examined how to measure and communicate apparel sustainability. While the focus here remained on tools measuring consumers’ aspects of apparel sustainability, SAC and the Higg Index were briefly mentioned, together with Nike’s Environmental Design Tool, as ways of decreasing environmental impact within the apparel industry. As recent as in 2017, a study by Blissick et al. was conducted where the researchers utilized themes incorporated across the Higg Index as a framework to examine retailers’ sustainability practices in managing the apparel supply chain for production and sale in South Africa. The study concluded that the one retailer who was showing a prominent sustainability performance, was most likely doing so due to their affiliation with SAC and their regular use of the Higg Index.

In general, much of previous research has mainly been focused on a consumer perspective of the increasing awareness and demand for sustainability within the fashion industry. While more scholars lately have examined what affects this has contributed with in the supply chains, most are focused on the social part of responsibility when referring to sustainability. Although acknowledging that SAC was formed as late as 2009 (officially launched as a legal entity in 2010), and the Higg Index officially launched not until 2011, very few scholars have examined, and incorporated SAC and the Higg Index in their studies. To my knowledge, there are no previous studies after 2013, examining how the organization and its tools have developed over time along with its global growth. This contributes to the motivation of this thesis, aiming to fill the knowledge gap about the development of the organization, creating a deeper understanding and knowledge about SAC, the Higg Index and on how this initiative can contribute with a foundation for global sustainable impact in the fashion, apparel and textile industry.
1.5 Case Study

1.5.1 The Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC)

SAC started through an unlikely collaboration between Walmart and Patagonia in 2009, with the mission to strive for a sustainable apparel, footwear, and textile industry which does not contribute to environmental degradation, but instead a positive societal impact (Patagonia 2018). In 2010, top leaders in the apparel industry, non-governmental organizations, academia, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency gathered for an opening meeting where a collaboration was suggested through the creation of a universal index measuring social and environmental performance to set standards for the industry (Patagonia 2018).

Later on, in 2010, the first official meeting was held, including participants such as Patagonia, Walmart, Target, Gap, Kohl’s, Levi’s, Nike, J.C. Penney, Esquel, H&M, Hanes, Li & Fung, Marks & Spencer, The Otto Group, Timberland, Duke University, The EPA, The Environmental Defense Fund and nonprofit labor-rights group Verite. One of the key reasons for these companies agreeing to work on common metrics concerning environmental issues were due to the several already occurred situations around labor and workplace issues, where many companies had learned the hard way how these issues would have been easier to tackle together. Further, many of the large apparel companies had their own codes of conduct, inspectors and reporting systems, meaning that a supplier catering for many companies could be audited and inspected several times by various methods, which seemed excessive. Instead, the members decided to continue of what then had been developed as the Eco Index, by the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), and in 2011, the first version of the Higg Index was released. Later Nike’s considered index was donated to SAC, which came to be a crucial step in the development process of the Higg Index. The future aim is to, by the help of these tools, create a label system that will inform consumers about the sustainability score of products in stores. (Apparel Coalition 2018)

By developing a standardized measurement tool, SAC enables industry stakeholders to measure and improve their environmental and social impact of apparel production throughout the entire product life cycle, encountering stages from design to recycling (Radhakrishna 2015). The initiative has been mentioned as a groundbreaking step forward of the attempt to construct green textile supply chains. Special attention has been drawn to the organization due
to the fact that it is the first grassroots collaboration coming from the corporates themselves instead of initiated by NGOs or enforced by governments (Poldner 2013). SAC has further been applauded for its success of founding an organization with such strong organizational culture, driving force and high degree of member commitment (Radhakrishna 2015). An unanimous agreement for the importance of reducing the negative impact on the planet has led to collaborations over borders, and competitors uniting over the greater cause (Patagonia 2018).

Today, the organization has over 200 global members, together representing nearly half of the entire volume of global apparel and footwear production, all working to develop and implement a common index measurement tool of assessing the apparel supply chain (Apparel Coalition 2018). “The Sustainable Apparel Coalition’s vision is of an apparel, footwear, and textile industry that produces no unnecessary environmental harm and has a positive impact on the people and communities associated with its activities” (Apparel Coalition 2018a). SAC seeks to lead the apparel industry towards a shared vision of sustainability built upon a common approach for evaluating sustainability performance (Patagonia 2018).

![Figure 1 - The Coalition Stakeholders](Attached in Appendix.)
1.5.2 The Higg Index

The underlying reason for the creation of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) is the Higg Index, a suite of tools developed by SAC. The tools are designed to measure the sustainability score of each step in the supply chain, and is intended to help brands, retailers, and manufacturers to make improvements in all regards of sustainability aspects, referring to human, economic, and environmental resources throughout the supply chain. The aim of the Higg Index is to develop a standardized industry tool measuring sustainability in the very same, comparable scaled way, enabling all parties involved in the apparel, footwear and textile supply chain to easily make improved sustainable choices across the globe. With the intended vision of full industry transparency, and with the goal to communicate sustainability scores to consumers, the Higg Index further encourages industry stakeholders to acknowledge their responsibility and improve their sustainable development. Meanwhile it aims to be able to later affect consumers in making active and informed purchasing decisions. (Apparel Coalition 2017a).

The Higg Index is divided into three main groups of tools, as stated in Figure 2. These consist of the *Product, Facility, and Brand Tools*.

![The Higg Index](image)

*Figure 2 - The Higg Index
Attached in Appendix.*

**The Higg Product Tools** assess a product’s sustainability impact and can be used both for prediction of a product’s impact, as well as for accurate calculation of impact once a product
is completed. The aim is to provide brands and manufacturers with necessary information for them to improve each step of a product’s development process. (Apparel Coalition 2018c). The following tools are included in the Higg Product Tools: *Higg Materials Sustainability Index (MSI)*, *Higg Design and Development Module (DDM)*, and *Higg Product Module (PM)*.

*The MSI* is a cradle-to-gate material scoring tool, which is measuring a material’s environmental sustainability impact and scores the result. Calculations account for potential of global warming, water scarcity, abiotic resource depletion, eutrophication, and chemistry. It allows users to make informed choices already in the early process of the supply chain, when deciding upon use of material, which will determine the sustainability impact of a product’s lifetime. The MSI further enables users to compare different materials, and their environmental sustainability impact in a standardized way. Through a database, users gain information about what causes a material’s environmental impact and how varied production processes can reduce or increase the impact. (Higg 2018).

*The DDM* is a guidance tool, assisting designers and developers in the early stage of the product creation process with information on how to reduce the product’s environmental impact. As designers and developers can control around 80% of a product’s environmental impact, this module’s goal is to design impacts out of products, to gain maximum reduction in negative environmental impact. Through answering a few questions regarding the design in an early stage of the design process, a design score is calculated together with information on how to improve the level of sustainability. Considering better materials and construction techniques can help to drastically reduce water use, wastewater polluting streams, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, and improve the impacts of a product’s entire life-cycle before that product is created. (Higg 2018a).

*The PM* is measuring a product’s environmental impact through its life-cycle, including measurement of water use, energy consumption, and affection of overall global climate. This module helps companies to assess the full life-cycle impact of a final product in a both cost- and time efficient way in comparison to other typical life-cycle assessment tools. It enables comparison between varied product categories and demonstrates what life-cycle stages or production processes that contributes with most impact. The aim of the module is to allow brands, manufacturers, and retailers to improve their production, and produce more responsibly. Further the module will enable users to calculate environmental impacts for
several textile products when produced at industrial scale, a critical step towards future product labeling and potential environmental legislation. (Apparel Coalition 2018d).

**The Higg Facility Tools** are used to measure the social and environmental performance of a manufacturer’s facility, measuring impacts at individual factories. These assessments are conducted once a year by minimum and are then verified by SAC-approved on-site assessors. Through benchmarking, facility managers can compare their performance against their peers. These tools provide manufacturers with guidance for improvements, and information of the current best practices in field, creating possibilities for open conversation among supply chain partners, striving for collective improvement throughout all tiers in the supply chain. (Apparel Coalition 2018e). Included in the Higg Facility Tools are: *Higg Facility Environmental Module (FEM)*, and *Higg Facility Social and Labor Module (FSLM)*.

*The FEM* is providing brands, retailers, and manufacturers with information regarding their environmental performance at their individual facilities, aspiring to improve these through reduction of energy- and water use, and carbon dioxide emissions. The module is available for usage for any manufacturer at any tier of the supply chain, and is measuring the following: environmental management systems, energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, water use, wastewater, emissions to air, waste management, and chemical use and management. To provide the Higg Index scores with credibility, and comparability, SAC is creating verification programs for each of all tools. The very first verification program will assess the FEM, and all scores shared with the public must first be verified by a third party. (Apparel Coalition 2018e).

*The FSLM* is created as a way to meet the increased demand of a transparent supply chain and working conditions in factories. It aims to provide safe and fair social and labor conditions for supply chain workers globally. This module enables manufacturing facilities to measure their social impacts in the value chain, as well as assessing the efficiency of social management programs, available for usage by any tier or manufacturer. More concretely it assesses the following: facility workforce standards and those of value chain partners, external engagement on social and labor issues with other facilities or organizations, and community engagement. In 2019, SAC aims to integrate the results of the Social and Labor Convergence Project (SLCP) into the FSLM tool, providing findings of the SLCP directly to the FSLM. (Apparel Coalition 2018e).
The Higg Brand Tool, also known as The Higg Brand and Retail Module (BRM) is available for businesses of all sizes, measuring the environmental and social impacts of their operations, and enabling improvements. It further assists users in sharing their sustainability information with stakeholders such as supply chain partners. The aim with this module is to provide brands, and retailers globally with the ability of establishing and maintaining strong CSR strategies and practices, highlighting the importance of caring for both human and planetary resources. This module is assessing a product’s lifecycle structure, from material sourcing to end of use. The BRM is measuring environmental and social impacts divided as following;

The Environmental impacts measured includes: greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, energy use, water use, water pollution, deforestation, hazardous chemicals, and animal welfare.

The Social impacts measured includes: child labor, discrimination, forced labor, sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace, non-compliance with minimum wage laws, bribery and corruption, working time, occupational health and safety, and responsible sourcing. The beta version of this tool will launch in April 2018. (Apparel Coalition 2018f).

The Higg Index is described as a way of transforming the supply chain into a transparent and open source for all parties of interests, where the environmental impact of each apparel product can be measured and categorized according to use of source (water, energy, greenhouse gas, waste, chemicals and toxicity). The Higg Index Roadmap to Transparency is SAC’s phased approach to achieve full transparency by 2020. All SAC members can share their Higg Index scores based on trusted assessments and verified data, thus activating transparency. To support members as they become more transparent, SAC provides communication toolkits that offer guidelines and support for score publication. (Apparel Coalition 2018a).
2 METHODOLOGY

This chapter aims to describe and motivate the scientific methodology applied to conduct this research. Detailed description of the following subchapters relevant for this study is presented as follows; Research Strategy & Design, Research Method, Data Analysis Method, and Data Quality.

2.1 Research Strategy & Design

Bryman and Bell (2015) highlight how the choice of methodology should be based on its ability to best answer the research questions, and further be motivated as the most suitable way to reach the purpose of the study. To fulfill the research purpose of identifying the key decision points and actions in the development of SAC and the Higg Index and gaining better knowledge and understanding about how to create a foundation for global sustainable development within the fashion, apparel and textile industry, it was chosen to conduct an exploratory case study of qualitative character with focus on abductive reasoning. The reason for this being how a case study will focus on deepening the knowledge about a specific situation in a real-life context (Dubois & Gadde 2002; Yin 2014) while the qualitative character allows the researcher to focus on the interpretation of words and creation of a contextual understanding for the collected data (Christensen, Engdahl, Grääs & Haglund 2016). The authors explain how this often is done through in-depth interviews. The qualitative approach is further referred to being ideal when aiming to gain a deeper knowledge about a specific topic (Bryman 2016) which is what the purpose of this research aims to fulfill and further why this approach was found most suitable. Bryman (2016) further explains how a qualitative study (usually collecting data through interviews, focus groups, or observations) provides the researcher with the ability to subjectively analyze a social phenomenon in depth, which was the intention with the in-depth interviews, which later will be described in further detail. Considering the limited availability of previous similar studies and theories confirming them and with the aim to gain a deeper contextual understanding about the researched area, the allowance for an interplay between theory and empirical data to successively provide understanding throughout the study was a crucial factor. The latter being referred to as abduction according to Bryman and Bell (2015). Due to the lack of previous research of SAC and the Higg Index, a deductive reasoning felt out of question. Further it was found important to allow for an interplay between empirical data and theory in order to establish a more
profound understanding which is why the decision was made not to limit the study to an inductive reasoning and why abduction felt most suitable for the study. The motivation behind the exploratory design of the case study will be further elaborated on below along with the motivation behind the case study.

2.1.1 Exploratory Case Study on the SAC

Bryman (2016) refers to exploratory design as an approach suitable for studies where the problem is not clearly defined, and where the aim of the study is to generate ideas and gain better understanding for a certain topic. Considering how this research has not identified a direct problem, but rather an area of interest, seeking to contribute with a deeper and more profound understanding for the development of SAC and the Higg Index, an exploratory case study approach was considered best suited for this study. Further, Bryman (2016) describes how exploratory research often is used when a topic is new, or data is difficult to collect. The study taking an exploratory research design can further assist in providing insights and a stronger familiarity for a phenomenon and contribute with ideas for future implications (Cooper & Schindler 2014). However, it is important to consider the choice of research design when drawing conclusions, as these based on exploratory research design should be drawn with caution to some extent considering their main focus of providing insight, not definite conclusions (Yin 2014).

Yin (2014) describes how a case study “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Aiming to provide with deeper knowledge, this further motivates the reason for conducting a case study, as the aim was to focus on the voices of those familiar with the development process of SAC and the Higg Index as a way to gain greater insight of the studied topic. Dubois and Gadde (2002) illustrate this as the strength of a case study, the ability to provide with relevant insight as case studies are situation specific, while enabling for the ability to capture the interaction between a phenomenon and its particular context. This specific strength however, was earlier criticized by Weick (1969). He described case studies as too altered after situations, and therefore criticized generalized conclusions based on this methodological approach. Although, ten years later the author changed his opinion, emphasizing this particular criticism as the advantage of the case study approach, referring to new insights describing findings as unstable over time (Weick 1979). Thereby, the case
study’s ability to capture situation specific learnings and data became viewed as a strength over a weakness. Today, case studies are perceived as a trustworthy and well established, common scientific methodological approach (Dubois & Gadde 2002). A case study can be viewed as the object of the study (De Vaus 2001). Olsson and Sörensen (2011) explain how a case study often is conducted on a person, an organization or a group. In this case study, SAC is representing the studied organization, while the Higg Index is the reason for its existence, and therefore is included as a natural embedded part of the case study. The motivation for choosing this specific organization is the lack of knowledge, understanding and existing updated studies examining its development, together with an expressed interest for its original foundation, structure, and development expressed in studies and by members of the organization. Considering the limited available information, and studies examining SAC and the Higg Index in relation to theories and its present context, a case study was perceived as the most suitable methodological approach. The contribution of this thesis will further aim to provide with both industry- and theoretical relevance.

2.2 Research Method

Qualitative research method is often identified by fewer, but more detailed sources, were the data collection is focused on words rather than numbers (Christensen et al. 2016). Observations, focus groups or in-depth interviews are common ways of collecting this type of data (Bryman 2016; Christensen et al. 2016). Bryman (2016) refers to how a focus group is a good method to use when aiming to discuss a specific topic in depth and where the researcher wants to identify how participants discuss when interacting with each other as a group, rather than how they discuss as individuals. The focus here is placed on identifying the interaction within the group, and the joint construction of meaning. Although this method would have been a good choice for this study and its purpose of identifying key factors in the development of SAC and the Higg Index, basic circumstances such as wide geographic spread of participants ruled out this alternative as impossible. However, Bryman (2016) explains how in comparison with a survey or an experimental method, qualitative interviews can contribute with a deeper insight and a more detailed description of a real-life situation. As the purpose of this study is focused on identifying key factors in the development of SAC and the Higg Index, and with the people of knowledge within this area not being geographically reachable ruling out the method of both focus groups and observations for natural reasons, qualitative
interviews became the obvious choice of method. 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted and will be further described below.

2.2.1 Semi-structured In-depth Interviews

The research method used in this study is what Bryman (2016) refers to as semi-structured in-depth interviews, which is a qualitative method where an interview guide help steer but is not limiting the process of the interview. Semi-structured interviews allow for the researcher to focus on certain subjects circled by the interview guide, while by posing open-end questions it also enables the respondent to develop his or her answers through free expressions and personal interpretations (Bryman & Bell 2015; Patel & Davidson 2011). Through this method, the respondent can discuss the questions in a broader sense (Patel & Davidson 2011). To be able to deep analyze collected data consisting of words obtained through interviews, it is therefore preferred to structure open-end questions focusing on how and why, enabling the respondent to provide with insightful and explanatory answers (Bryman & Bell 2015). The interview guide was therefore structured with this in consideration, focusing on open-end questions. Further, the questions were partly altered after the respondents, and their relation to SAC. For example, when interviewing respondents representing member companies and utilizers of the tools, some of the questions were posed differently than if interviewing respondents representing the developers of the tools. These alterations were small and concerned only a few of the questions, which all can be found in the interview guide attached in the Appendix.

Further, the interview guide was developed based on the identification of the existing gap of knowledge regarding the development of SAC and the Higg Index, and with the aim to provide with data relevant for fulfilling the purpose of this study. Bryman and Bell (2015) further underline how the use of an interview guide can help the researcher not to collect too broad amount of information which might be the risk if not following any structure. Therefore, the semi-structured interviews were conducted focusing on the identified gap of knowledge this study aims to fill. Despite the use of an interview guide, this research method can risk the collection of too much or irrelevant data, which is why the researcher still must aim to steer the interview to some extent (Gillham 2008). Although some of the questions in the interview guide partly were altered after the respondent’s specific relation to SAC, and
despite a variation of follow-up questions which sometimes naturally occurred during interviews, the constant aim was to keep focus on the circled areas expressed in the questions of the interview guide. To further assure collection of data relevant for the purpose of this study, the researcher always described the purpose of the study to the respondent in the beginning of the interview, while including the purpose at the top of the interview guide as a constant reminder of what data collection to focus on throughout the entire interview. Further, as the interview guide was constructed based on the existing gap of knowledge after going through information available on SAC’s website, as well as articles discussing the organization and the Higg Index, the ability to fulfil the purpose of the study was facilitated by the assurance of collecting relevant data.

2.2.1.1 Skype & Telephone Interviews

Bryman and Bell (2015) describe face-to-face interviews as the best kind, considering the ability to allow for interpretation of body language and facial expressions. However, due to the global spread of the respondents, and limitation in both time and resources, this was not a possibility. Instead, the aim was to conduct Skype interviews, where the ability for body language and facial expression interpretation still exists through the use of video chat. Only when no other option was available, the Skype interview was conducted without video or the method of telephone interview was used, which was two times due to technical obstacles. All interviews were conducted in the respondent’s natural environment, mainly at their office or in their home, due to the ambition of minimal distraction, as mentioned by Bryman and Bell (2015). The authors emphasize the importance of this as the respondents should feel as safe and comfortable as possible to provide with reality-based information. In total 10 interviews have been held, where two were over phone and lasted about 20 minutes, while the others were held through Skype and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. In allowance with the respondents, all interviews, except for the ones through telephone, were recorded to facilitate the transcription of data. Bryman (2016) highlights the ability to listen to the interview again as a cruciality for correct interpretation and minimized risk for misunderstanding, or coloring of researcher’s personal assumptions.
2.2.2 Transcription and Process of Collected Data

Bryman and Bell (2015) further express how transcription of interviews will facilitate the assurance of accurate information gathering and minimize the risk of confirmability of researcher’s individual thoughts, opinions or interpretations of what was discussed. Additionally, transcription of interviews is referred to as the most suitable way to assure for an accurate and trustworthy analysis in the later stage of the research process (Bryman 2016; Rennstam & Wästerfors 2015). All interviews were therefore transcribed, and although the telephone interviews could not be recorded, notes were taken throughout the entire interviews with longer pauses in between questions to assure no information went missed. After the telephone interviews, the researcher went through the written notes one additional time securing the elimination of shortages of words that otherwise would risk to later be forgotten or not understood. In addition to this, the notes were sent to the participants for them to proofread the outcome of the interview ensuring no misinterpretation had occurred. This was done for all participants.

Transcribing and analyzing collected data parallel with the ongoing process of further collection of data is recommended as a way to shed light on potential new subjects or discussions which might occur during the process (Lofland & Lofland 1995). This further minimize the risk of the researcher feeling overwhelmed with material to go through after completing all interviews, while enabling her to process the material successively (Lofland & Lofland 1995). Although this was the aim, not all interviews were transcribed or analyzed in direct connection to the conduction of them, due to some being scheduled too tightly upon each other. An additional factor which affected the inability of continuous analyzation throughout the data collection process was the time it took to gather and process information of best suitable analysis method for the approach of this study.

2.2.3 Sampling

For best ability to fulfil the purpose of this case study, purposive sampling was used by intentionally selecting people with the most likely ability to provide the researcher with relevant and informative data through insightful answers. A purposive sampling has the goal to provide with participants who are most relevant for the research (Bryman 2016; Luborsky
& Rubinstein 1995). It is a strategic way of sampling and it is well suited for research focusing on selection of units such as organizations, people, or departments (Bryman 2016), which well suited this study. Initially the aim was to interview people with great knowledge and insight about the development of SAC and the Higg Index such as founding members, developers, or participants linked to the development of the organization and of the tool. This can also be referred to as criterion sampling (Bryman 2016). These criteria were set due to the focus of the interview guide, which aim was to collect relevant data for the ability to fulfil the purpose of the study. Although criterion sampling was used to reach participants with relevant knowledge for the study, snowball sampling was also adapted, which according to Luborsky & Rubinstein (1995) allows for participants to act as referral sources, enabling them to recommend other who they know or find suitable for the study. This enabled contact with participants which otherwise would have been difficult to reach, or even identify as eligible participants due to the limited availability of information about their involvement in the development process. It further enabled to develop the study and provide with broader insights than initially planned for as it led to interviews conducted with retailers engaged in the development process of SAC and the Higg Index, but who also function as utilizers of the tool, and not only developers.

2.2.3.1 Participants

The sample size consists of 10 participants with prior knowledge, insight, participation, and experience of the development process of SAC and the Higg Index. Since the organization is global, uniting all stakeholders within the fashion, apparel and textile industry from brands, manufacturers, to NGOs and government, there was a need to partly limit the variation of participants to contain and narrow down the focus of the study as described in the introduction and in the purpose. Therefore, it was chosen to focus on those stakeholders representing the majority of those which have been a part of the organization’s founding initiative. However, the aim to interview manufacturers could not be fulfilled due to the inability of reaching the desired people to talk to. See Figure 3 below.
A short presentation of the respondents who have participated in the interviews is presented below in Figure 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>DATE OF INTERVIEW</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>YEARS OF INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>YEARS OF SAC EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>WORK TITLE</th>
<th>CURRENT WORKPLACE</th>
<th>RELATION TO THE SAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2018-02-09</td>
<td>Kevin Elstreg</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>Global Sustainability Expert &amp; Managing Director</td>
<td>Leadership &amp; Sustainability</td>
<td>Former Chair of the Board of Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2018-02-12</td>
<td>Kevin Myotte</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>Director Global Brand Services</td>
<td>Rhuapex Technologies</td>
<td>Involved in the creation of the OIA &amp; the Eco Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2018-02-27</td>
<td>Simonetta Carboni</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Since foundation</td>
<td>Consumer Psychologist &amp; Strategic Consultant</td>
<td>The Swedish School of Textiles</td>
<td>Board Member &amp; Former Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2018-03-12</td>
<td>Catharina Louis</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Project Manager Global Sustainability</td>
<td>CoA</td>
<td>Project Manager and Transparency Team Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2018-03-13</td>
<td>Rick Edgeway</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Since foundation</td>
<td>VP Public Affairs</td>
<td>Patagonia</td>
<td>Initiator and Co-Founder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2018-03-29</td>
<td>Brian Jensen</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Since foundation</td>
<td>Senior Director of Sustainable Business Innovation</td>
<td>OIA</td>
<td>Involved in the start up meetings, recruitment and working groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2018-03-30</td>
<td>Amy Roberts</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Since foundation</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>OIA</td>
<td>Involved in the development of the Eco Index &amp; on the Board of Directors (SAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2018-04-05</td>
<td>Julie M.H. Brown</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Director of the Higg Index</td>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>Involved in the work with the Higg Index Product Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2018-04-12</td>
<td>Sina Grechich</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Since foundation</td>
<td>Senior Project Manager Sustainability Team</td>
<td>CoA</td>
<td>Involved in OIA’s initial engagement with the SAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2018-04-20</td>
<td>Henrik Alpen</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sustainability Engagement Manager</td>
<td>H&amp;M</td>
<td>Overseeing H&amp;M’s engagements with the SAC &amp; the internal alignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.3 Data Analysis Method

Choosing the analysis method for the collected data is an important decision, and whether what approach a researcher may apply, it is crucial that he or she takes responsibility for providing with a truthful and highly trustworthy content of analyzed data (Starks & Trinidad 2007). There is a strong argumentation for the lack of available tools for data analysis methods applicable to qualitative research despite the growth of the common qualitative approach among researchers (Attride-Stirling 2001; Nowell, White, Moules & Norris 2017; Thorne 2000). Thorne (2000) in consent with Attride-Stirling (2001) emphasize the essence of a clear account for the data analysis process and refer to the frequency of researchers who fail to provide with this. Nowell et al. (2017) further clarify that there is a clear distinction between a description of a data analysis process, and telling what you have done, and why. A connection between readers’ inability to fully comprehend a researcher’s data analysis process and the lack of existing tools available for researchers when analyzing qualitative data has been identified (Attride-Stirling 2001; Nowell et al. 2017; Thorne 2000). Therefore, the chosen tool of method for this data analysis process has been carefully selected after its fit with this particular study, and its ability to account for all parts of the analysis process. Further it aims to clearly communicate each step of the analysis process and account for what was done, and why. Therefore, an inductive thematic analysis method was chosen and will be further presented below.

2.3.1 Inductive Thematic Analysis

An inductive thematic analysis method was chosen as it provides the researcher with a great deal of flexibility while allowing the researcher to in a clear way communicate all steps of the analysis process, as described by Nowell et al. (2017). Gläser and Laudel (2013) explain how qualitative content analysis is a frequently used analysis method but how it is incompatible with a study which is not build upon theory, aiming to force concepts onto the data. Therefore, it is further less suitable for a study taking an exploratory approach, such as this one. The authors further emphasize the advantages of conducting a coding approach which does not depend on theory when the research approach is descriptive or exploratory. The further motivation for choosing the method of thematic analysis is partly due to the flexibility it provides with not being adjusted after theory and therefore suited well with this study taking
an exploratory case study approach allowing for adjustment accordingly. Additionally, King (2004) highlights how this type of data analysis process is well suited when seeking to summarize key features in a large set of data and how the process of the method enables the researcher to provide with a well-organized and structured result. Considering the researcher of this study being limited to one person, it was important to find an analysis method providing with a well arranged and clear approach on how to successively analyze the large amount of collected data in an organized way ensuring the researcher to remain as objective as possible throughout the entire data analysis process with the help of a clear structure for the entire process. Further the aim was to identify key factors in the development of SAC and the Higg Index, which this analysis method enabled for in a very clear and efficient way. It further allowed to organize the identified themes in correlation to the desired identification of factors as a natural part of the process and finally present them in the result in a well-structured way.

Thematic analysis has lately been referred to as a foundational choice of method when analyzing data from a qualitative research (Braun & Clarke 2006; Nowell et al. 2017; Thorne 2000). Meanwhile, there have been authors in the past (Boyatzis 1998; Holloway & Todres 2003; Ryan & Bernard 2000) protesting of referring to this approach as an individual method meaning that it rather should be viewed as a part of the process included in qualitative methods. However, Braun and Clarke (2006) in accordance with Nowell et al. (2017) emphasize how the many alternative approaches of using a thematic analysis only strengthens the reason for it being viewed as an individual method. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to identify, analyze, organize, describe and report themes in the collected data (Braun & Clarke 2006). It has further been described as a translator between researchers speaking the language of qualitative and quantitative analysis (Boyatzis 1998). Nowell et al. (2017) explain how although thematic research is able to provide with insightful findings there has been little account for how to concretely apply this method, why the authors have structured a framework by the use of six phases, carefully reviewing how each phase of the process contributes with a rigorous and trustworthy analysis of data. To enable the reader to in a clear way, follow the data analysis process of this study, it will be presented according to these six phases below.
Phase 1 - Get to Know Your Data

This first phase is about overviewing the collection of data, starting to get to know it to deeper analyze it in a later stage (Nowell et al. 2017). Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how this part is necessary in regardless of who gathered the data, it must be revisited and carefully reviewed for the researcher to be able to further develop the material in the analysis. Nowell et al. (2017) describe how in this stage it is crucial that all collected data has been documented for and stored for the researcher to go through it yet again. In this study, all interviews were transcribed, and the majority also recorded, which in addition of facilitation of transcription further allowed for the researcher to revisit what was being discussed and through that getting to know the material better. Supplementary to this, notes from opponents, comments from the supervisor, and thoughts which derived from seminars throughout the process were saved, which Attride-Stirling (2001) refers to as an advantage in order to remain and later sort all thoughts when preparing for the development of the analysis. It can further contribute with additional insight which may otherwise risk getting lost in the collection of all data. In this phase the researcher re-read all the transcriptions of the data, some several times while including comments and thoughts, old and new ones, while marking words in the text which appeared frequently, in a way to start building the framework for the themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend researchers to start this way as it will help to structure the yet rather unstructured collected data. Further it can help the researcher to easier identify patterns, facilitating the creation of themes. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further emphasize how the inclusion of the researcher’s personal thoughts and comments to the text will serve as a reminder of what thoughts derived from pre-knowledge, raw data, and what derived from the researcher’s interpretations. This can further assist the researcher in the process of remaining as subjective as possible can be while interacting with the material.

Phase 2 - Start Coding

After processing and carefully going through the material in phase one, it is time to start coding. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how the researcher by now should have gotten familiar enough with the data to be able to start identifying what is interesting and worth observing in the text. This is the initial phase of coding, which allows the researcher to simplify the broad amount of collected data through breaking it down and focus on broader topics of interests which have generated her attention (Morse & Richards 2002).
the transcriptions with the included notes and marked words, patterns began to appear. In order to facilitate the coding of text, color markers were used, separating the variation of patterns, allowing for the researcher to see which colors appeared more frequently, and through that understand which themes and color combinations to focus on. There are several ways of coding, and several coding manuals to use, however what is most important is that in regardless of which technique is being used, this should be used consistently throughout the coding of all data (Attride-Stirling 2001). Further Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize the importance of successively processing the data through coding, spending as much time on all parts of the data to provide with a fair coding process. There can be as many codes, or themes identified as one wishes but within a reasonable number for the process to provide with the efficiency and organizational structure as it is supposed to contribute with (King 2004). Attride-Stirling (2001) further emphasizes how the codes should have rather strict boundaries and not be too similar in order for them to all contribute with the facilitating distribution of text. In this research, the initial coding started out with 20 identified broader themes, presented later in the result chapter.

King (2004) explains how there are several programs facilitating the coding and the organization of the data. However, the author, in accordance with Thorne (2000), highlight how there is no program providing with the intellectual and conceptualizing processes which are necessary to apply when transforming the data. In this study, the coding was done manually through the help of color markers. Lincoln & Guba (1985) explain how the credibility of the coding increases if there is more than one researcher analyzing the data. This may be viewed as a disadvantage of this study as there was only one researcher coding and analyzing the data. However, the supervisor as well as the opponents took part of the process and the transformation of the raw data through seminars where this was being discussed in relation to the analysis from a variation of approaches and perspectives. Sharing the thoughts and the data with peers during the transformation process could assist the researcher in her further development of the material (Nowell et al. 2017).

**Phase 3 - Identification of Themes**

In phase three, the identification and establishment of themes can begin. Braun & Clarke (2006) explain how this part accounts for the sorting and collection of the coded data and transforming what is relevant into themes. A theme can be described as something capturing
the essence of something, it must not necessarily provide with a concrete concept but rather as a collector of several different components which may not represent as much when viewed in the lonesomeness (Nowell et al. 2017). The aim with the identification of themes is for them to link portions of the data together. Here one must clarify whether the theme has derived from an inductive or a deductive approach. An inductive thematic analysis describes how the identified themes have derived from the raw data, in comparison with a deductive thematic analysis where the themes rather have derived from theory or prior research (Boyatzis 1998). What further must be clarified is how the approach of the thematic analysis applies exclusively to the analysis process, and not to the research process in general. In this study, abductive reasoning was applied in the research strategy, allowing for an interplay between theory and result, while an inductive approach was applied in the thematic analysis, focusing exclusively on how to identify and develop themes when analyzing the result. The thematic analysis taking an inductive approach was the most obvious and suitable way to conduct this analysis considering the limited selection of available prior research as well as theory strengthening it. Further it naturally follows the exploratory research strategy for this study and its abductive reasoning. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how an inductive thematic analysis is data driven rather than theory driven, this means that the researcher escapes the risk of forcing themes into already existing coding frames which may not suit as well with the collected data as the themes which derive straight from the raw data. However, this might further mean that the identified themes relate very strongly with the collected data, but less with the interview questions. For this reason, the researcher must keep this in mind, particularly in this study where the interview questions are based on the existing gap of knowledge. When developing the identified themes, a careful review of the interview questions was conducted, assuring no topic of interest went missing. However, King (2004) emphasizes not to put too much effort in ensuring that all themes match all the interview questions, they can be viewed as a way of guiding but not limiting the thematic analysis.

Based upon the twenty previous mentioned themes identified in the coding process, eight themes were developed and identified as relevant for this study (presented in the result chapter). These were developed through using a mind map, which according to Nowell et al. (2017) is one of many ways in which a researcher can develop and identify her themes. There are ways being more structured, or more creative when developing the identification of themes, what is crucial is that no matter chosen technique all themes should be developed in the same way.
Phase 4 - Reviewing the Themes

Phase four circles around reviewing the identified themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) explain how the researcher yet again must review the coded data, ensuring the themes which have derived from it provides with a coherent pattern. In terms of validity, the authors express how it is highly recommended that each theme should fulfil the ability of capturing and highlighting meaningful topics expressed in the data. It is further of importance that the themes present this in an individual approach, with clear distinction of one theme from another. King (2004) explains how the themes in this phase are most likely to change in some way. Some themes may not fulfil its purpose of providing with meaningful data, or it may be too similar to another theme, in which case themes can merge together. Some may be removed completely, and some may change only in terms of caption (King 2004). Attride-Stirling (2001) emphasizes how the goal in this phase is to provide with a more manageable data through the establishment of relevant themes which summarize the data in the best way possible. In this case, a thorough review of themes was conducted, ensuring no important set of data had gone missing in between the identified themes, and further ensuring how no excessive, irrelevant data was being forced into themes which would not provide to the study. The result of this review led to the redefinition of the eight previous themes merging into a set of four more specific yet broad enough themes to capture essential ideas expressed in the data. These four were given a collective headline which relates to the purpose of this study, as a reminder of what they should seek to identify. These four are illustrated in Figure 7 in the result chapter presenting what the merge looked like and from where the new themes derived. Nowell et al. (2017) explain how these steps are natural parts of phase four, which consists of the researcher carefully reviewing the themes, and specifying which ones are relevant to keep, being those who are specific enough to separate the text in the data, but broad enough to capture essential meanings in the text which will be valuable for the development of a thorough and deep analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to coding as an ongoing organic process. However, at the end of phase four, the researcher should have a clear image of the refined themes, what they focus on, how they correlate to each other, and to the essence of the data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Lincoln and Guba (1985) underline how this can can be assured by again revisiting the raw data and examine if the refined themes correlate with the raw data in a clear sense, and if it is evident to see that they have derived from there, in which case the inductive approach of the thematic analysis has been successful. This was done several times.
by the researcher but also by the opponents confirming how the themes showed of clear connection to the raw data.

**Phase 5 - Defining Themes**

The fifth phase can be viewed as a summary of phase four. It is here time to test if what was conducted in phase four (reviewing and ensuring the establishment of the new themes to be the ones which best captured relevant data for the study and its purpose) correlates as well to the raw data in the way it should (Nowell et al. 2017). In order to test this properly, the authors emphasize the need for conducting a detailed analysis behind each specific identified theme, illustrating how this theme captures the essence of the story it aims to tell. In this study this was done through gathering all coded data and placing it below the theme it belonged to, then re-reading all that data, and ensuring that it corresponded with the heading of the theme. What was not, was then marked in a different color for the researcher to in the end re-visit that particular part of the text which did not corresponded to the particular theme. Thereafter, the researcher tried to identify if it would suit better below any of the other already established themes, in which case it was replaced. Or, if it was a sufficient amount of text in which a connection could be found both within the text and in relation to the study and its purpose, in which case there might be a theme missing which needs to be included. If so, the themes can yet not be finalized (King 2004).

King (2004) explains how one of the most challenging parts of a thematic analysis is for the researcher to decide when to stop developing themes. However, it is a cruciality as this process otherwise could be a never ending such. One way of facilitating this is according to Braun and Clarke (2006) to name the themes in such a way that they immediately communicate what they aim to present, enabling the researcher to determine what data is suitable for which theme, assuming that all themes presented in this phase have been reviewed enough to now ensure their relevance for the study and its purpose.

As a single researcher it is advised to consult with outside peers, ensuring that the finalized themes to a high extinct relates well with the data, the story it aims to tell, and further correlates with the purpose of the study (King 2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985) underline how peer debriefing can provide the researcher with unexplored aspects of the study which otherwise may risk going lost. Further it is important that the thematic analysis is given
enough time for going through all phases in a calm and thorough way as this provides with credibility (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Being a single researcher in this study, the thematic analysis took a long time to conduct in this recommended sufficient way. However, it facilitated the organization and the ability to structure the coded data in a clear way, providing with a thorough and deep analysis. Although the analysis has been conducted by one researcher, the process has been debriefed with the opponents, and the supervisor during seminars, ensuring that the researcher has been receptive towards external thoughts, ideas and perspectives throughout the entire process. Finally, Braun and Clarke (2006) explain it as such that if the researcher is able to in a clear and distinct way describe the scope of content relating to each individual theme, phase five is completed. Through the four finalized themes; Getting the right people on the bus, then teaching them how to drive it, Industry collaboration through democratic organizational culture, Trustworthy standards, communication & transparency throughout the supply chain, Striving for global sustainable development = good for business it is the researcher’s belief that they in a clear and coherent way, individually describe the scope of the results.

Phase 6 - Producing the Report

Once the final phase has been reached, it is time to start writing the final analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasize how this should be written in a logic order, and provide with a well written, nonrepetitive and capturing text which defines the data and the identified themes within it. Further King (2004) underlines the need for communicating the findings in a vivid way which captures the interest of the reader, while keeping the voices of the respondents alive. The author, in accordance with Braun and Clarke (2006), therefore highlight the importance of including quotes in the analysis as these can provide the text with an additional dimension. Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss how the researcher should integrate with the analysis, inviting the reader into a discussion regarding interpretations, potential connections, or deviation from the literature, and not just present a flat description summarizing what has already been said. With the aim of avoiding both repetitions, and an excessively long paper it was chosen to present the result of the findings directly in the analysis and in integration with the theories. The researcher aimed to provide with an as vibrant analysis as possible, including several quotes from various respondents (all approved by them), keeping their voices as present throughout the entire chapter. Meanwhile, it was important to present the analysis in a logic order, enabling the reader to easy follow the ongoing discussions in the
analysis. Therefore, it follows the same order as how the conversations developed with the assistance from the interview guide, this was the most natural way to present the findings in the analysis. Thorne (2000) further express how it is crucial to provide with this chronological order of presenting the findings, ensuring a critical reader that the interpretations made further have developed as such, and not derived from pre-assumptions or the rush of jumping to conclusions. The author explains how this provide the findings with credibility and trustworthiness.

Further it is brought forward by Nowell et al. (2017) how the analytic credibility will depend on how coherent the arguments provided by the researcher in the analysis are. Although the theories included in the analysis can be used to strengthen and question the findings, it is significant how the discussion surrounding this is presented in a logic way for the reader to follow the researcher’s thoughts and interpretations of the gathered material. Further Nowell et al. (2017) explain how the trustworthiness of the research process refers to how well the researcher succeeds with underpinning her main points by using the data. For the research to achieve high credibility, it is further examined how well the researcher success to discuss all relevant findings, including those who were unpredicted (Starks & Trinidad 2007). In this particular study the researcher has aimed to account for all relevant data, while integrating it with the theoretical framework and clearly illustrate how this interconnection of material support the interpretations which have derived from this integration. Through an attempt to present the analysis in an as clear and structured way as possible, the entire analysis follows the same structure of first introducing the findings in the data, then connecting it to relevant theory, and then describing why this theory is relevant for the findings. The main aim being to constantly and in a clear way substantiate what is being brought forward in the analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to how the analysis should tell a story where it clearly emerges what each theme has brought to the topic of the study. As a final assurance of the analysis being truthful, the researcher could send the material to the participants for them to confirm that the researcher’s interpretations of what was being said during the interview match with reality (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Tobin & Begley 2004). The respondent confirmation in this study was conducted after the transcription of interviews, but not after the composition of analysis. The reason for this being lack of time before submission in combination with how no initial data has been jeopardized in terms of twisting what was said and therefore this additional confirmation was not prioritized.
2.4 Data Quality

When discussing the quality of a research, validity and reliability are two commonly used criteria. However, it has been discussed whether these might be more suitable and applicable for quantitative studies over qualitative such (Eriksson & Wiedersheim-Paul 2014; Nowell et al. 2017; Patel & Davidson 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight the trustworthiness of the research results as one of the most crucial parts. The authors describe how this in qualitative research can be fulfilled through using the following criteria: Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability as a complement to validity and reliability. Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) assessment of trustworthiness have been widely accepted, and recognizable for the broader audience. Therefore, these criteria were chosen as a way to ensure acceptability and usefulness of the results derived from this study.

2.4.1 Credibility

For a study to provide with a high level of credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to a few varied techniques which the researcher can use, such as researcher- and data collection triangulation, prolonged engagement and persistent observation. As this research was conducted by one single researcher, the triangulation in this aspect was difficult to fulfil. However, through seminars the study and its research method have been discussed together with opponents taking part of the collected data and the process of it, contributing with insights and views from additional perspectives. Although only one method of data collection has been used, the data has been gathered from 10 separated in-depth interviews and was collected from a variation of participants contributing with different approaches and perspectives of what was discussed. This is to assure that the study does not only mirror one perspective, but rather taking several insights into consideration when analyzing the data together with theory. Similarly, the theory presented was collected from a broad variation of authors and voices. One additional way of assuring achievement of credibility is to confirm the result of the collected data with the participants from whom you’ve collected it from, what Guba and Lincoln (1989) refer to as respondent validation. In this study, this was done through sending the participants the transcriptions from the held interviews for them to confirm that what was being said correlated with what had been put in text. All participants confirmed the transcription of their interviews. Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize this
confirmation as a way of ensuring no misinterpretation or coloring of researcher’s personal opinions will affect how the data is presented and later analyzed.

2.4.2 Transferability

Tobin and Begley (2004) refer to how transferability seeks to confirm the ability of generalizing the result. When discussing transferability in qualitative research, the authors limit this to case-to-case transfer. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further explain how it might be difficult for a researcher to know to what precise extent an additional party will aim to transfer the study and its findings to. However, it is therefore crucial that the researcher provides with an as clear description of the study and its process as possible, enabling the additional party to make a valid decision of whether the study is transferable to another setting or not. The exploratory character of this case study has been clearly emphasized, describing how generalization of results should be drawn with consciousness and how this is not the aim of the study, but rather to create a deeper understanding about a yet fairly unexplored organization and the unique collaborating composition of it. Rather than generalizing the results of this study, the aim is to provide with insight and knowledge, and generate an interest in how industry collaboration can contribute to creation of foundations for sustainable development.

2.4.3 Dependability

For a qualitative study to achieve dependability, the researcher must provide with a complete description for each step of the research process (Tobin & Begley 2004). This can be achieved by the researcher being as transparent as possible throughout the entire research process, as well as in the description of it (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Tobin & Begley (2004) emphasize how dependability further can be achieved through the researcher’s assurance of the research process being logic, traceable and well documented. In this study this has been done through the storage of all raw data, comments and thoughts during opposition seminars and supervision meetings, and through recording those interviews who enabled for it, as well as conducting full transcription of all interviews. Further all interviewed participants have been accounted for in this chapter, providing with information about their experience from the industry, their current work title as well as the company they work for. This further provides
with transparency, and traceable information about where the data collected in this study comes from. Additionally, the researcher has aimed to present the research process in a clear, informative and structured way throughout the entire methodology chapter, and through the inclusion of the interview guide attached in the Appendix.

2.4.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the researcher’s ability to demonstrate how her study has been conducted in such a way that if repeated, the data collection would provide with the same results (Tobin & Begley 2004). The authors underline how it must be clear that the researcher’s interpretations and the result she presents originates from the collected data. This further implicates that motivation behind conclusions and theories used in these in combination with the data must be presented and accounted for. This has remained as a prioritized aim throughout the entire research process, again referring to how interviews were recorded, transcribed and further sent to the respondents as a way of excluding misinterpretations, and assuring that trustworthy data was obtained. As the theories accounted for in this study derive from themes identified in interviews, it was further crucial to ensure that the data obtained through the interviews was accurately interpreted and presented in such a way that the respondents could recognize and confirm their voices, as these steered the theoretical framework. Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasize how confirmability is achieved only when all three additional criteria have been reached.
3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework aims to present theory identified as relevant for this study. The structure of this chapter will aim to follow the structure of the identified themes in the interviews, to as large extent as possible, and thereby aim to follow the structure of the how the data collection is presented and analyzed in chapter four. Further the headings and subheadings of the chapter are inspired by the themes identified via the interviews and presented accordingly to these.

3.1 Collaborative Organizational Culture

“Countless efforts by companies to work together to tackle the most complex challenges facing our world today including climate change, resource depletion, and ecosystem loss—have failed because of competitive self-interest, a lack of a fully shared purpose, and a shortage of trust.”

(Nidumolu, Ellison, Whalen & Billman 2014, p. 77)

Partnership, collaboration, and alliance are common denominators when referring to the growing business trend of the 21st century. The Oxford Dictionaries describe the previous mentioned terms in the same order as following; An association with two or more people as partners, The action of working with someone to produce something, and A union or association formed for mutual benefit, especially between countries or organizations (Oxford Dictionaries 2018). Spekman, Isabella and MacAvoy (2000, p. 37) account for an alliance as “A close, collaborative relationship with the intent of accomplishing mutually compatible goals that would be difficult for each to accomplish alone”. Further Steinhilber (2008, p. 2) refer to a strategic alliance as “a relationship between one or more organizations that through the combination of resources, can create significant and sustainable value for everyone involved”. Ultimately an alliance is about reaching common visions and goals through most efficient use of resources and thereby creating added value for all involved stakeholders.

When Elkington (1994) had introduced the concept of social, environmental, and financial responsibilities being interrelated and referred to as the Triple Bottom Line framework, he continued exploring the theory in varied contexts (Elkington 1998). In 1998, the author applied his Triple Bottom Line theory in the context of companies benefitting from long-term partnerships in business. Elkington (1998) emphasizes how these types of collaborations can
ease the transition process towards sustainability efforts. He explains how innovative partnerships are essential for a success within the triple bottom line performance. Further he discusses how these new constellations will bring competitors and industry associates together contributing with business performance efficiency and a platform where common goals can be identified and reached through strong engagement of long-term partnerships. These partnerships can vary in terms of constellation. Some may solely include industry competitors while others could consist of collaborators from varied industries, sectors and include government as well as NGOs (Elkington 1998; Grant & Baden-Fuller 2004). The essence being that an established partnership is a non-negotiator if aiming for sustainable development no matter what sector or industry being discussed. Nidumolu et. al (2014) explain how many companies individually have started to incorporate sustainability in their businesses through various ways. However, the authors emphasize how there is yet not enough progress within collaborative solutions aiming to reach systemic change within the field.

“To move beyond incremental improvements and achieve a shift to a new textiles economy, a concerted, global, systemic, and collaborative approach is needed that matches the scale of the challenge and the opportunity”

(The Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017, p. 26)

3.1.1 Multi Stakeholder Collaborations

One issue that Elkington (1998) discuss is how new constellations of partnerships sometimes result in what the author refers to as corporate monkey traps. He explains this as when companies lock themselves into a certain box instead of embracing inspiration and their full potential made available through collaborations and partnerships. He underlines how these partnerships should strive for maximum optimization by partners being open to change and to learn from each other rather than holding on to old ways of how to operate as this will result in losing the advantage of the partnership. By jointly seeking to identify what challenges to collectively overcome, and setting up goals for how to do so, multi stakeholder collaborations hold a great advantage, and must view their variation of background, industry and knowledge as their greatest source of collaborative power (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The authors conclude how through multi stakeholder collaborations, new business models, large-scale projects and innovations are made possible, and how working precompetitively is the key to success. Poldner (2013) agrees, stating how organizations should seek benefits in
partners contributing with supplementing skills and competence, and through that establish a competitive advantage which can support the development of the organization’s supply chain. Nidumolu et. al (2014) emphasize how multi stakeholder collaborations can be complex and suggest a solution to the complexity. This being the benefit of having a neutral partner with expertise in trust building among multi stakeholders leading the management of the collaboration. Further the authors underline how this project manager should be aligned with the project’s goals and visions and prioritize the success of these, rather than the success of an individual stakeholder.

While Elkington (1998) acknowledges the challenges that these types of partnerships might face along the way, he emphasizes the opportunities that comes with multi stakeholder partnerships as business value, explaining how the composition of multiple perspectives has shown great results in the past. Among other things he refers to how they have resulted in optimized strategies and priorities for accurate real-life situations, while to a larger extent being perceived as more credible by all stakeholders involved. Further it is being emphasized how broad multi stakeholder collaborations are needed when aiming to achieve systemic change (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). It is further emphasized how these visions should be built around different actors such as industry, government, civil society and the broader public, with the simple explanation of none of them being able to achieve global systemic change by themselves (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Nidumolu et. al 2014). Nidumolu et. al (2014) add how these collaborations should put specific emphasis on new ways to collaborate focusing on processes and environmental impact.

3.1.2 The Right Key Players

In the most recent publication by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) the authors emphasize how key industry players must unite and create a clear visualization for their common goal and how to reach it. Elkington (1998) refers to the key players within strategic alliances as customers, suppliers, competitors, complementors and services or other inputs, emphasizing how strategic partnerships and collaborations surrounds around complements. Other key players being identified by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) is; designers, buyers, textile mills, recyclers, industry associations, initiatives, NGOs and international bodies. Meanwhile they emphasize the importance of academia engaging in these multi
stakeholder engagements to shed light on important knowledge gaps which should be prioritized to minimize. Nidumolu et. al (2014) explain how optimal successful collaborations should start with a small group of carefully selected players, and then develop with additional players sharing similar interests but varied expertise, encouraging productive competition through collaborating. Ultimately, it revolves around complements and complementing key players creating a joint plan for how to reach their set vision and committing to it will streamline the progress of any process according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017).

The authors further discuss how they view a new level of collaborations, where multiple brands constitute the key players and are working together on a precompetitive level for best efficiency and progress in transitions within the area of a new textiles economy.

Elkington (1998) in support of the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) puts emphasis on the cruciality of NGOs engaging in collaborations and partnerships with business as a way of transitioning towards sustainable business paradigm and tackling global environmental and sustainability issues. Elkington (1998) describes how business-NGO relations are strategic partnerships between selected parties striving for and demanding a sustainable development agenda, giving example of partnerships such as The Body Shop and WWF for example. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) emphasizes how the involvement of NGOs secures that broader and necessary environmental and societal issues are being taken into consideration. The authors further conclude how international multi stake holder engagements can drive change through their global visibility and impact on the market, here referring specifically to how retailers and brands hold a great part of the power as they can influence decisions regarding the design of clothes as well as who will sell them. In addition to this, the authors underline the large amount of influence and power an industry initiative rapidly can gain if comparing with government initiatives and legislation which usually is more time consuming and sometimes less efficient. Things which may be difficult to incorporate in law can be achieved by the right people engaging in voluntary agreements (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Nidumolu et. al (2014) further underline how although many sustainability collaborations often include various stakeholders such as NGOs, academia, and governments, it is the participation by the right players which matter if aiming to reach systemic change. The authors elaborate by explaining how these should include key players which these sustainability initiatives directly will affect, emphasizing how them changing their daily operations and practices should be what contributes to change. Nidumolu et. al (2014) gives an example of how if aiming to create a standardized system for measuring environmental
performance across the value chain, then the *right players* would typically include companies across the value chain. Further SAC’s Higg index would be a good example of how them making changes in their daily operations and behavior could contribute with broader systemic and global change.

### 3.1.3 The Equal Partnership

Nidumolu et. al (2014) divide collaborations into two categories; corporate ones and extended ones. Corporate collaborations are those which include manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, retailers and additional players within the business value chain. The authors explain how non-corporate players may provide with input but how they are not the essential part of the collaboration. Extended collaborations however, include both businesses and non-corporate players (NGOs, academics, government and other stakeholder communities for e.g.), where all parties are viewed as equal partners within the collaboration (Nidumolu et. al 2014). Elkington (1998) puts a lot of emphasis on how there is a need to rethink the rules of partnerships as they develop and how the rules will apply, and change based on what partnership you hold. Meanwhile, it is being stated how in regardless what type of partnership and mission with the partnership you hold, there is a need for an equal partnership aligning participants within multi stakeholder organizations and collaborative initiatives, allowing for all voices to be heard (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The authors describe how research has shown that the main issue is not a lack of collaborative partnerships and multi stakeholder efforts, but rather the coordination and alignment within them. The authors explain how when aiming to develop a sustainability management tool, you do not only need a variety of stakeholders because of their separate knowledge, but also because you need to establish credibility, trust and a strong commitment with the stakeholders, and this must be done through wider partnerships. The reason for this being is how in order to create this strong engagement and commitment among stakeholders (which later will contribute with propounded credibility), they need a feeling of ownership, and in order to provide them with that, you need a variation of stakeholders all being able to contribute in varied fields (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The authors explain how through an equal partnership where all stakeholders feel ownership over the product or project being developed, a strong commitment and engagement will arise and motivate them towards reaching that common
vision and goal. Further alignment, collaboration and coordination is being emphasized as key pillars of success within a multi stakeholder organization aiming to achieve change.

3.1.4 Trust

“Without trust, most collaboration efforts are unlikely to survive, however noble the cause and worthy the participants” (Nidumolu et. al 2014, p. 80). Elkington (1998) agrees, emphasizing how trust is a key pillar for the success of a multi stakeholder partnership and explain further how in order to develop and establish trust, rules must be laid out and accepted by all parties. Here the author underlines the importance of understanding how a multi stakeholder initiative also means multiple ways of perceptions. Therefore, he refers to how a set of rules will be helpful when aiming to gather all separate views and opinions within one united organization with trust as a key pillar. Meanwhile he emphasizes the need for all participants’ ability to place themselves in their partners’ shoes. Poldner (2013) emphasizes how this is crucial in an organization such as SAC, where one must be able to trust that all partners strive towards the organization’s common goal, not prioritizing actions which only will benefit certain individual brands or companies. The author express concern regarding stakeholders’ ability to prioritize actions leading towards advancement for industry change over prioritizing actions being beneficial on an individual level. Meanwhile the establishment of mutual trust and common goals as motivation are being referred to as the superior solution for reaching business value. Further Nidumolu et. al (2014) describe how SAC successfully has fostered a strong organizational culture which is resting on the collaborative spirit and on the mutual trust in between its members. Elkington (1998) highlights how the establishment of mutual trust can be perceived as a way of cutting costs and delays in project development and other processes. He further explains how in multi stakeholder collaborations, trust helps bridge relations between individual companies and their stakeholders, placing focus on their united goals and aspirations instead of their competitiveness. Along with trust, a strong commitment and an ambitious attitude are crucial factors for achieving results in a multi stakeholder collaboration (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Nidumolu et. al (2014) agree, underlining how the main priority of a collaborating initiative should be to build and maintain a culture of trust if aiming to become a successful collaboration.
3.2 Connecting Sustainable Development with the Global Fashion Industry

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines sustainable development as the following “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987). The three key pillars of sustainable development include economic development, environmental protection and social equity. According to Cao et. al (2014), the fashion industry is accountable for affecting at least two of these, referring to environmental protection, and social equity. Blissick et. al (2017) emphasize how globalization, the fast fashion industry and the race to the bottom are all reasons for why sustainability has become a growing concern within the fashion industry. Cao et. al (2014) refer to environmental challenges such as the amount of water and energy use, wastewater from textile production, textile waste, and apparel being disposed to landfills after its end of use. Blissick et. al (2017) explain how industry stakeholders recently have started to align and put pressure on the environmental performance of brands and retailers, explaining how expectations on improvements is the new institutional norm. Regarding the social equity pillar, issues within the fashion industry often circle around unfair wage and working conditions, and encouragement to consumerism (Cao et. al 2014; Dickson & Eckman 2006).

Regarding the economic development pillar, Kareiva, McNally, McCormick, Miller, and Ruckelshaus (2015) underline how multinational corporations account for 40% of the world’s 100 largest economies. The global market of the fashion and footwear industry alone was recently valued to $3 trillion and is further expected to increase by $60 billion in between 2010 and 2020 (Dean, Lane & Tärneberg 2017). Meanwhile Dean, Lane & Tärneberg (2017) refer to how almost 67 per cent of the world’s clothing exports and 57 per cent of the textile exports are produced in developing countries. Kareiva et. al (2015) emphasize how multinational corporations influence both the global commerce, the human well-being and the environment and why they therefore also should be considered an essential part of global development outcomes. In accordance with this, multinational corporations have lately, to a greater extent, been pressured to acknowledge their large part of the responsibility considering sustainable development (WCED 1987). Specific emphasis has been placed on their engagement of production in developing countries. With fashion often being referred to as a reflection of our times, sustainable development efforts within the industry are necessary and
they need to happen now (Dean, Lane & Tärneberg 2017). The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) highlight how businesses play a key role in the transition process towards a sustainable fashion and textile industry. The authors emphasize how large-scale, precompetitive, multi stakeholder and cross-value collaborations can drive change. They further underline how sustainable development within the fashion and textile industry cannot be achieved by any single actor alone but acquires multi stakeholder collaborations.

3.2.1 Sustainable Development = Added Business Value

Elkington (1998) explains how the incorporation of viewing sustainability from the triple bottom line within the environmental agenda has led to NGOs acknowledging the key role that businesses hold. The author underlines how businesses and NGOs working together for sustainable development not only is necessary for reasons stated above, but also how it provides with added business value. Creating productive relationships with key NGOs, working for sustainable development efforts, is a strong first-mover advantage (Elkington 1998).

“We believe that our products can offer higher quality and value to people if we integrate eco-efficiency as a fundamental part of the initial product concept. This will enable us to use more environmentally friendly materials, and fewer of them, which in turn will reduce waste, risk and costs.”

(Joseph Mallof, SCJ Executive VP at U.S. Environmental Defense Fund, Elkington 1998)

Nidumolu et. al (2014) exemplify how the Higg Index not only contributes with better outcomes, but how it also influences capital investment decisions while driving change in operational behavior. The authors emphasize how it has led retailers and brands to change the way they operate in terms of selecting suppliers. By integrating the Higg Index to their supplier scorecard, the measures will affect which supplier to choose. Nidumolu et. al (2014) go on explaining how the Higg Index has contributed with reduced fabric waste through improved product design, reducing both financial and environmental resources. In addition to this, the index has led to better manufacturing investments such as wastewater recycling and efficient use of energy, while contributing to higher performances with companies adapting productive competition through departments comparing their scores.
Elkington (1998) describes how the incorporation of sustainable development efforts within business seldom has been considered a main priority, whereas its importance frequently has been questioned. Further the author emphasizes how those who realize its potential of added business value and decides to prioritize sustainable development efforts often reach this conclusion due to inputs coming from outside of the company, or additional stakeholders adding to the initial discussion. In the search of added business value, Nidumolu et. al (2014) emphasize how stakeholders within a collaborative engagement should search for a common denominator in their self-interests and their shared interests. The linkage between these is what would result in added business value for all parties. The authors go on emphasizing how the key to the linkage is to quantify how the collaboration will contribute with reduced costs or alternatively provide with revenue to each individual stakeholder. Yet they underline the importance of not letting the self-interest become the driving force, as this most likely will result in a collaborative failure, and loss of business value for all engaged stakeholders. Added business value should be perceived as a combination of long term commitments and goals, and quick wins (Nidumolu et. al 2014). However, the authors explain that sustainable development initiatives often place larger focus on long-term goals which barely are marginal in the short term, emphasizing the risk of losing commitment and momentum if not also embracing quick wins.

“Business thrives on visible and immediate results, and sustainability collaborations are no exception. Even if these wins are small initially, the cost savings or incremental revenues provide proof to other executives inside participants' organizations that the investment is worthwhile.”

(Nidumolu et. al 2014, p. 84)

Elkington (1998) emphasizes how new opportunities for unforeseen collaborations will present themselves due to the increasing awareness of sustainable development, and how it is creating a new era of partnerships. He explains the importance of integrating all voices, coming from both NGOs, business and the market. A good example of seeking added business value while striving for global sustainable development, is the journey of the dairy industry. Increasing demands from NGOs, consumers, and retailers to reduce the industry’s carbon footprint made key business leaders realize how the entire industry was threatened (Nidumolu et. al 2014). This led to initiated collaborations, aiming to seek ways of how to meet these demands, and integrate operational innovation throughout the entire value chain, while keeping the industry profitable. The collaboration faced challenges, as sustainability
most frequently was identified with increased costs and government regulation, without any connections to added business value (Nidumolu et. al 2014). However, through the collaboration, one managed to identify ways of how to meet the demands of desired decreased carbon emissions while identifying new resources to benefit from. In addition to this the pre-assumptions and judgements regarding sustainability changed with an increased understanding for the meaning of the word, and what it could contribute with (Nidumolu et. al 2014). Further the authors emphasize how the comprehension of meeting the demands of your customers became essential for the further development of the dairy industry. They conclude how striving for global sustainable development can provide with added business value. However what needs to be emphasized is that in regardless of eco-efficiency efforts made by individual companies or stakeholders, sustainable development is dependent on the progress of collective industries, integrated complete supply chains, and whole economies (Elkington 1998).

3.3 Sustainable Supply Chain Management in the Fashion, Apparel & Textile Industry

Sustainable Supply Chain Management (SSCM) can be defined as “a set of managerial practices that include all of the following; Environmental impact as an imperative, Consideration of all stages across the entire value chain for each product and; A multi-disciplinary perspective, encompassing the entire product life-cycle” (Gupta & Palsule-Desai 2011, p. 235). Perry (2013) emphasizes how the fashion industry has become an essential part of the discussion concerning SSCM. The global shift of garment production taking place in low-labor cost countries has led to a socioeconomic impact and issues including sweatshops, child labor and worker exploitation throughout the supply chain (Ekström 2015; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Kaiser 2012; Kozar & Hiller Connell 2013; Perry 2013). Environmental and social abuse within all steps of the textile and apparel supply chain have been increasing over the last decade (Dickson, Eckman & Loker 2009; Kozar & Hiller Connell 2013). Production processes within the supply chain are both water and energy demanding, further they often include the use of toxic chemicals in the production of goods. Dickson, Eckman and Loker (2009) underline the many environmental concerns regarding the disposal of these harmful chemicals, and other wastes within the fashion industry. Perry (2013) accounts for how there is an ambivalent complexity concerning sustainability within
the consumption focused fashion industry and illustrates the ambition behind the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). He clarifies how CSR should contribute with sustainable development in the fashion industry through promoting social and environmental goals while contributing with economic growth. Yet the lack of environmental and social responsibility throughout the fashion supply chain is a constant debate (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Kaiser 2012).

Young, Jirousek and Ashdown (2004) highlight how the incorporation of sustainable solutions within the fashion supply chain lately has been focused on the design stage. However, the authors emphasize how the entire production process needs to be reconsidered if aiming to transition to a sustainable supply chain. They highlight considerations in materials, design, resources, products in general, and processes affecting both the environment and the people. Environmental efficient production processes would further be less costly and require fewer inputs of resources (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The closed loop concept has been expressed as a way to prolong a product’s life cycle by instead of discarding an object after its end of use, turning it into something new (McDonough & Braungart 1998). This could help tackling the issue of textile and apparel waste ending up in landfill or as incineration within one year after being produced (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Yet, the garment production has doubled over the last decade, producing 98 million tons of nonrenewable resources yearly (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). As a result of these alarming numbers threatening both the environment and the people within it, brands and retailers are seeking ways of how to address these issues within their supply chains. Gereffi and Frederick (2010) highlight the influential power larger brands and retailers possess within buyer-driven supply chains allowing them to affect the decision-making process. Clothing designers such as Stella McCartney and Ralph Lauren are in the lead of reforming the fashion industry, committing to organic cotton over conventional one while focusing on water and carbon emission reduction, several large brands are further committed to obtaining a sustainable supply chain by 2020 (Sweeny 2015).

However, the authors within the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) highlight the insufficiency of only addressing particular individual issues within the supply chain, and instead advocate for systemic change as the only solution (and the time to act being now). They refer to examples of implementations such as common industry guidelines, aligned efforts and increased transparency, while acknowledging the power of policy makers and the
influence they possess. Ultimately, they advocate for a new circular textiles economy to replace the current linear system. They further express how the costs of negative externalities should be accounted for to support the transition to better resources use and production processes contributing with beneficial systemic change.

“It is still a new science and only a few case studies and enabling tools are available to support companies and industries to transform. Even if such tools were available, changing a complex system is not something that can be planned and executed in a static, deterministic way. A design-thinking approach is required, bringing actors together from across the system to collaborate, prototype, learn, refine, and scale what works.”

(Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017, p. 26)

However, Perry (2013) highlights the complexity within how various brands within the same global fashion industry operate their supply chains differently. She specifically refers to SSC challenges facing the high street fashion industry working with short lead times and low costs. Further, this is usually an integrated part of their business model and therefore also the expectations of their customers (Bruce, Daly & Towers 2004). The authors further underline what impact production processes has on labor conditions in supplier factories, and how changes of these processes must include taking the employees’ prerequisites into consideration. Masson, Iosif, MacKerron and Fernie (2007) go on emphasizing the complexity of the high street fashion industry’s global sourcing networks and how this could aggravate the already existing challenges of systemic change. For these reasons, actions towards a systemic change of a new textiles economy must consider the current pre-conditions and develop further from these (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). “This includes considering targets on the phase-out of substances of concern and plastic microfiber release, quality and durability standards, requirements to design for recyclability, and minimum levels of recycled content in clothing” (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017, p. 28).

Ultimately, the authors illustrate four ambitions, each resulting in separate specific actions and solutions for an improved level of sustainability within the fashion textile industry. Two highly emphasized applications for solutions are the need for standardized measurement tools and transparency to assist with the incorporation of sustainable action in the supply chain. The authors mention the Higg Index and refer to it as a set of tools enabling for both assessment of
products, and individual stakeholder’s negative impact and the measuring and tracking of sustainable improvements.

**FIGURE 5: AMBITIONS FOR A NEW TEXTILES ECONOMY**

![Ambitions for a New Textiles Economy](image)

Figure 5 - Ambitions for a New Textiles Economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017, p.23). *Attached in Appendix.*

### 3.3.1 Standards

The frequency of issues related to practices of social responsibility within the fashion industry has resulted in the development of more and stricter brand guidelines and requirements, often expressed in individual codes of conducts and with the implementation of new measurement systems (Dickson, Eckman & Loker 2009). Further it has led to global initiatives, various standards and the increased need for monitoring of factories (Dickson, Eckman & Loker 2009; Ross 2004). In today’s globalized fashion industry, several suppliers cater for brands all across the world (Gereffi & Frederick 2010). In this aspect, it is being emphasized how global collaboration, coordination and alignment is crucial to reach large-scale change, and to ensure standards are implemented in all steps within the supply chain, and within all global areas.
(Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Nidumolu 2014). This further demands an open dialogue throughout the entire value chain, and industry, where stakeholders can communicate in a standardized way, meaning sharing the same comprehension for same terms and standards (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Further this would demand innovation for global system solutions and new global industry standards and guidelines applicable to all international stakeholders. These are actions which depend on one another and mutually reinforce each other (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017).

Nidumolu et. al (2014) too emphasize coordination of stakeholders in the aspect of them aligning on desired outcomes through creating standardized metrics measuring environmental impacts and benchmark performance. However, with the broad variation of brand’s individual standards, and measurement tools, the result has led to an expanded workload for all stakeholders within the industry (Cao et. al 2014). This further contributes with the necessity to increase resources and or deepening the knowledge of social and environmental impact within the supply chain. Young, Jirousek, and Ashdown (2004) go on explaining brands’ and retailers’ responsibility when it comes to assisting suppliers with implementing new and potentially mandatory systems needed to ensure compliance with set standards. The authors emphasize how this is a crucial step to fulfil if aiming for the suppliers to stand a chance of improvement. The importance of alignment and collaboration are emphasized when it comes to the implementation of common standards and the aim to improve the supply chain process from design of clothing to its end of use, understanding the effects of this entire process (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Precompetitive collaboration between designers, buyers, textile mills and recyclers should circle around ways to implement common standards or guidelines concerning design and material selection for increased sustainability within the textile supply chain (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The authors emphasize the consideration to improve and increase durability and recyclability, while decrease substances of concern and microfiber release. Further they confirm how most companies understand the need for multi stakeholder collaboration when aiming to develop common sustainability management tools.

Chouinard, Ellison and Ridgeway (2011) however, refer to how most brands and retailers rely on third-party standards and certifications managing their sustainability impacts and their way of communicating it to their customers. The authors problematize the fact that there are approximately over 400 varied certifications and green marks currently in use, many overlapping with one another. Further many of them only cover parts of a product’s impact,
focusing solely on water or energy use for example, not providing a holistic view of the product’s entire production process and the impacts of it (Chouinard, Ellison & Ridgeway 2011). O’Rourke (2014) emphasizes how the most common methodology tool used for a holistic view is life-cycle assessment (LCA). LCA is a method analyzing and turning sustainability data into useful information for decision makers (O’Rourke 2014). However, this method is often considered time demanding and expensive. With this in regard, Chouinard, Ellison and Ridgeway (2011) propose a precompetitive apparel collaboration to create a value chain index (VCI), profitable for all stakeholders within the fashion, apparel and textile industry. The authors emphasize how a VCI provides data produced from lifecycle analysis efforts, covering a broad range of categories including land, water, energy - and toxics use while including social welfare and the ability to rate the products. This idea is what generated the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), where fashion and textile industry stakeholders are working together with NGOs and academics to develop this set of tools, called The Higg Index (Cao et. al 2014). These measurement tools will assess a product’s content as well as the negative impacts of individual stakeholders within the fashion, apparel and textile industry while measuring their efforts of improvements (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The Higg Index has been referred to as the most extensive and representative existing transparency measurement tool for the fashion, apparel and textile industry, covering the majority of large companies as well as including SMEs (Eder-Hansen et. al 2017). Further it encourages a race to the top, through motivating companies who score lower than their competitors to improve their index ratings (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Nidumolu et. al (2014) further concludes how the most efficient way of driving systemic collaboration is through global industry performance standards, while the best way to improve global CSR is to identify targets for desired outcomes and measure the progress.

### 3.3.2 Transparency

In order to drive stakeholder engagement on sustainability, transparency must be achieved throughout the fashion industry, namely within the supply chains (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). To increase transparency in the fashion supply chain, brands must be willing to disclose product information and traceability (Chalmer, Eder-Hansen, Lehman, Tochtermann & Tärneberg 2018). Further, these brands should aim to, in a standardized way, identify the environmental, social and ethical impacts of the production processes with their suppliers. Chalmer et. al (2018) emphasize how this could be done through brands mapping
their first and second tier suppliers and disclosing a continuously updated list of these. This could be viewed as a first step, where step two could entail additional third and fourth tier supplier transparency. Individual brand commitments on transparency actions are a great start, however collaborative commitments are needed to reach momentum and achieve change (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The final aim being to reach a comprehensive understanding on all environmental and social impact caused in the entire supply chain (Chalmer et. al 2018).

Considering the social pillar, Kozar and Hiller Connell (2016) underline the unfair wages of manufacturing workers within the fashion and apparel supply chain, referring to them being paid two-thirds less hourly comparing to other industries. This further has led to an increased need for monitoring of suppliers, ensuring their compliance with the brands’ codes of conduct or set social standards, which may vary as the globalized fashion industry has resulted in suppliers catering for brands all across the world (Gereffi & Frederick 2010). Poldner (2013) emphasizes how brands should recognize their part of the systemic issue and acknowledge how the incorporation of transparency throughout the supply chain would contribute not only with solutions to the issue of excessive compliance monitoring but further drive sustainable development.

Dickson, Eckman and Loker (2009) further remind of the key role the consumers hold in this discussion, explaining how their purchasing power could further affect and contribute with sustainable development throughout the supply chains. However, Kozar and Hiller Connell (2016) highlight the lack of transparency within the industry as an issue resulting in consumers’ lack of knowledge and ability to use their purchasing power in a more profound way. Several studies have pointed out consumers’ increased engagement in, and will to, purchase from sustainable fashion brands. Yet the lack of transparency throughout fashion brand’s supply chains is an obvious obstacle preventing consumers from making informed pre and post consumption decisions (Dickson 1999; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Examples of what sort of transparency information that could be helpful and effective would be product’s content, production history, properties for use and after use, durability and care, material content and recycling options to inspire actions for end of use (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Gereffi and Frederick (2010) claim that brands who will not compete on a transparent level will not last much longer, underlining the increasing demands, not only by consumer but also by regulations, policy makers, NGOs, and entire industries. Further it is
being emphasized how increased transparency can assist in stimulating demands concerning sustainable actions within the fashion supply chain and help drive sustainable development within the industry (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Transparency can also create stronger engagement with industry stakeholders who gain insight in what the development process looks like (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). This could further lead to a greater engagement with policymakers and create important discussions with additional actors and industries.
4 RESULT & ANALYSIS

This chapter will present the results of the collected data and an analysis integrating the theories presented in chapter three. To facilitate the comprehension of this chapter, it has been divided into six subchapters. The first will introduce the identified themes in the interviews, which are what this chapter will circle around. Further these themes have been used as inspiration for the structure of this chapter as well as the headings of the five remaining subchapters; How it all started (with OIA), Collaborative Organizational Culture, Striving for Global Sustainable Development, The Fashion, Apparel and Textile Supply Chain, and How it all continues. The chapter will strive towards being presented in the same chronological order as the development of SAC and the Higg Index to as large extent as possible. The analysis is naturally embedded, following the same structure aiming to make it easy for the reader to follow.

4.1 Presentation of Identified Themes

After conducting the inductive thematic analysis, the themes deriving from the interviews were identified and redefined in three stages (phase 2, phase 3, and phase 4), as mentioned in the methodology chapter. These will briefly be presented below with the aim to introduce the reader to the focal points of the collected data, while allowing the reader to easier follow the presented result and analysis while comprehending the structure of the chapter.

From phase 2, the following twenty themes derived.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Organizational Culture</th>
<th>Industry Initiatives</th>
<th>The Right People</th>
<th>Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Equal Partnership</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply Chain</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
<td>Sustainable Development</td>
<td>Fashion Industry</td>
<td>Reduce Impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Business</td>
<td>Not striving for perfection</td>
<td>Momentum</td>
<td>Standardized Tool</td>
<td>Measuring Sustainability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In phase 3, these were compiled and narrowed down to eight themes presented in Figure 6 below;
Later in phase 4, these eight themes merged into four final themes identified as key factors for the development of the Higg Index and SAC. These are the following: *Industry collaboration through democratic organizational culture, Getting the right people on the bus, then teaching them how to drive it, Trustworthy standards, communication & transparency throughout the supply chain, and Striving for global sustainable development = good for business.* These four themes are further the ones which have inspired the headings as well as the structure of the Theoretical Framework, and the Result and Analysis chapter.

The merge of the eight themes deriving in four final themes are illustrated below.

---

**Figure 6 - Identified Themes via Interviews**  
*Attached in Appendix.*
Further the result from the ten interviews are here presented and analyzed together with theories deriving from the Theoretical Framework.

### 4.2 How it all started (with OIA)

#### 4.2.1 Getting the Right People on the Bus

When discussing the respondents’ relation to the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (further referred to as SAC) and the development of the Higg Index, they all quite naturally started to talk about the initial development which led to the creation of the Higg Index, and how it all started with discussions long before SAC was officially created.
Kevin Myette, current Director of Global Brand Services at Bluesign, tells how he was working for REI at the time when discussions regarding environmental impact measurements started to spread among the sports and outdoor industry. He explains how there were many mixed messages out there, and how some brands had started to define clearer measures of environmental impact, such as Timberland, Nike, and Patagonia to some extent. “But they still didn’t have an index or measurement”, Myette says. Amy Roberts, Executive Director at the Outdoor Industry Association (further referred to as OIA), agrees with Myette stating that many brands within the outdoor industry started to develop their own sustainability labels, and how they at OIA experienced concern regarding this from many brands, and retailers, namely REI. She explains how they were worried that there would be too many different sorts of standards and no uniform way of measurement, which eventually would confuse consumers in their decisions. She goes on saying how although there had been progress in the area of social compliance around labor, it had further created frustration among suppliers being forced to adjust to several different standards from different brands and customers. “So, the idea was to come together and develop a uniform measurement system as an outdoor industry”, she says.

This correlates with the findings presented by both Cao et. al (2014), and Dickson, Eckman & Loker (2009), emphasizing how the increased number of standards, guidelines and brands’ and retailers’ individual codes of conducts are too many for any stakeholder to benefit from. Further it strengthens the repeatedly expressed beliefs regarding how multi stakeholder collaborations and partnerships could assist in matters such as these (Elkington 1998; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Nidumolu et. al 2014; Poldner 2013). Not to mention the emphasized importance of reducing and then measuring the reduced environmental impact in an efficient and profitable way as highlighted by multiple authors (Chouinard, Ellison & Ridgeway 2011; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Nidumolu et. al 2014; Young, Jirousek & Ashdown 2004). However, in this stage of the development, the discussion seemed to only concern actors within the sports and outdoor industry, yet not embracing the idea of a broader multi stakeholder engagement.

Myette further explains how the more they studied the subject and discussed it with colleagues in the industry, the more inspired they all became to explore the possibility of developing an industry led initiative focusing on measuring the environmental impact. Soon this initiative came to life through stakeholders gathering within OIA and together they started
to develop the Eco Index. “One of the early key decisions was to put a lot of time into communicating and developing measurement for sustainability”, Myette says. Karin Ekberg, Global Sustainability Expert at Leadership and Sustainability, was working for Adidas during this time. She describes how she got in contact with OIA and was presented to the structure of the Eco Index and their vision of creating a tool that would measure the entire supply chain. “We had discussed this a lot at Adidas too”, she says referring to how they had talked about “[...] our impact, our risks, and our opportunities”. Once she saw the structure of the Eco Index, she was convinced it was the right way to approach the issue. Adidas joined in early 2009. Ekberg describes how the initiative started out with many American and Canadian companies engaged. She goes on telling how OIA was the driving force behind this initiative, and how it first was outdoor companies who were approached to join, “[...] but you also wanted to include fashion and sports companies”, she says. “Nike had been engaged, and were approached to join early [...], later they started to get in contact with new companies, such as Puma and H&M”, Ekberg says.

Elkington’s (1998) suggestion regarding innovative partnerships’ ability to provide with triple bottom line performance, supports the importance of including varied stakeholders in an initiative described as such above. Further it is being emphasized how global systemic change requires a collaboration which represents the scale of the challenge (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The ambition of reaching full industry representation as described above correlates well with the authors’ key indications for how to succeed with a collaborative industry initiative battling broad issues such as desired decreased environmental impact. However, Nidumolu et. al (2014) emphasize how optimized successful collaborations first should start with a smaller group of carefully selected key players, and then, develop further with additional contributors of varied expertise, similarly to the description of Ekberg.

Meanwhile, Myette describes how the founder of Patagonia, and the CEO of Walmart had engaged in a similar conversation regarding sustainability and reached the conclusion of industry collaboration being the right path. This was the beginning of what later came to develop as SAC. Rick Ridgeway, VP of Public Affairs at Patagonia, describes further, “It was our idea at Patagonia, we made the invitation to Walmart, and they accepted and joined us”. Myette further describes how preliminary meetings were set up and how they had invited some people already active in OIA. He explains how OIA wanted to show power of collaboration, and instead of putting a stamp on the Eco Index, they decided to join SAC and
share what they had been developing since 2006 (the Eco Index). Beth Jensen, Senior Director at OIA, describes how the discussions regarding gifting the Eco Index to SAC had been going on within OIA for quite some time already. “We had many conversations about potentially gifting it [the Eco Index] to the SAC as a key foundational element (along with Nike’s Materials Sustainability Index Tool) of an index that could serve the broader apparel industry along with the outdoor community as well”, Jensen says. She further expresses how they had realized how this index only could go so far within the outdoor industry, referring to how many were using the same suppliers, explaining how they would only reach a certain level of scale within the industry and only have a certain amount of funding to build a software tool allowing the index to be adopted more broadly. “So, we talked about those key factors [...] and decided it was the right thing to do, gifting this index to the broader group for further care and development”, Jensen says. She explains how although the whole intent with the Eco Index was for it to spread as wide as possible, some members found it challenging to accept the idea of gifting the Eco Index and losing ownership of something “they had put thousands of hours of ‘sweat equity’ into”. Yet she goes on saying; “I think most folks in the broader group understood that it should go to a broader group, and the SAC, being a broader organization, was the perfect place for that”. She further emphasizes how SAC elsewise would have been forced to start from scratch, while they at OIA already had over 3 years of experience where they had started to develop the tool, thinking about structure, the right questions and so on. “It really helped SAC to start running, having that structure in addition particularly to the MSI data that Nike donated [...] for the product module tool”, she says.

The discussion regarding gifting the index to serve a broader global industry and purpose is relevant to the thoughts of both Elkington (1998) and Steinhilber (2008), expressing how an alliance is about reaching common visions and goals through most efficient use of resources and thereby creating added value for all involved stakeholders. Further the authors emphasize how this way of operating can contribute with business performance efficiency and provide with platforms enabling action plans for how to reach common goals through long-term partnerships and engagement when embracing the power of collaboration. It can be interpreted how visions such as these were decisive in this situation and led to the important key factor of having OIA donating their work to SAC. Further Poldner’s (2013) beliefs about supplementing skills and competence providing with competitive advantage could be applied as something positive. In contradiction to Jensen’s concern about members losing ownership through donating the index to the broader organization, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation
(2017) rather believe this will increase the feeling of ownership. In fact, it is being expressed how broader variations of competence and stakeholders is what contributes with increased commitment and feelings of ownership (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The more stakeholders contributing to the development, the more stakeholder ownership, commitment and engagement.

Jensen describes Patagonia as the essential founder of SAC, while referring to how Nike was a really important player sitting on all that robust set of data regarding materials and sustainability that was nowhere else to be found. “ [...] bringing them [Eco Index and MSI tool] together to mash them up as a starting point was a no brainer”, she says. Roberts agrees, referring to Nike as the key player within the area of sustainable materials and how to process them. She explains how Nike had spent years on developing their database that measured impacts, and how they, sharing this with SAC, allowed SAC to quicker understand how material compares, and how this basically provided the initial platform for information to be fed into.

“I think that they [Nike] had been looking for quite some time for the right organization that were not tied to any commercial enterprise to donate their work to. Because, to some point, Nike is in the business of making sporting good and maintaining a material database is not their core focus and it’s expensive, and they also knew that even though Nike is large and one of the biggest players in the apparel and footwear market worldwide they still needed the cooperation and work of others to create change [...]”

(Amy Roberts, Executive Director, OIA)

This quote can to a large extent be related with what the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) express about how a global, systemic and collaborative approach is a key requirement if aiming to achieve globally scaled, systemic change. It further relates with how Nidumolu et. al (2014) describe innovative ways of viewing collaborations and partnerships when striving for contributing with sustainable development change.

Simonetta Carbonaro, Professor within Consumer Psychology at the Swedish School of Textiles, describes how she got in contact with Yvon Chouinard, the founder of Patagonia, during a conference she was organizing in 2008 where Chouinard was a keynote speaker. “He sent the template of a letter signed by him and the CEO of Walmart, in which he was inviting other apparel companies to create a common sustainability index and go for transparency”,

- 58 -
Carbonaro says. “I think it was a very smart move of Yvon, instead of going for an easy journey and starting to build an alliance with ‘David’, that is with brands and retailers already doing the right thing (in terms of sustainability), he approached ‘Goliath’, Walmart, the retail titan”, Carbonaro says. She describes the initiative as counterintuitive from the start, referring to how ‘David and Goliath’ would be united instead of fighting for the same aspirational goal, providing both actionable and aspirational aspects of the project with credibility.

This could be viewed as a step in the right direction of development in the aspect of how Nidumolu et. al (2014) describe the lack of collaborative solutions fighting for systemic change. This rather unpredicted collaboration between Walmart and Patagonia further confirms the key action of how varied stakeholder expertise and experience provides with the most dedicated and powerful collaborations (Elkington 1998; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Nidumolu et. al 2014; Poldner 2013). Concerning the credibility being emphasized by Carbonaro, Elkington’s (1998) theory assumes this credibility is rooted in how a variation of stakeholders bring trust and how trust further is a key pillar helping bridge relations and establish credibility.

Ekberg describes how Adidas was contacted during autumn 2010 by a colleague at Patagonia, asking them if they were interested in co-founding SAC, which they were. “SAC was initially founded as an informal organization, it wasn’t a legal entity until 2012”, Ekberg says, explaining how that was when they started hiring people and when Jason Kibbey, the current CEO of SAC, came to place. Myette, along with Jensen describe how until then, SAC was facilitated by Blu Skye consulting group. Jensen expresses how they launched the organization without having an executive director for about 9 months, but how it worked out through having Blu Skye as an agnostic party, convening all different brands together. Jensen goes on describing how prior to the official launch of SAC, many meetings were happening with initial leadership groups putting SAC together, in which OIA were actively participating in.

“We had launched the Eco Index to the global outdoor industry in summer of 2010. This was the 1st version of the Eco Index. Then March 2011 was when SAC was formally announced, that was when work really started happening, bringing it all together to create the broader global index prototype.”

(Beth Jensen, Senior Director, OIA)
Jensen explains how prior to the official launch of SAC, they were working on figuring out what the integration of tools would look like. She explains how today’s Higg Index was developed from OIA’s Eco Index, the Nike MSI data tool and partly from the tool of the Global Social Compliance program. “Those were the three main groups of tools that came together to donate their work to create this broader index”, Jensen says. She explains how they launched SAC in March 2011, and how Blu Skye continued to facilitate SAC until 2012 when Jason Kibbey was appointed Executive Director, and SAC became a legal entity of its own.

Having a neutral party facilitating SAC is in alignment with Nidumolu et. al’s (2014) solution of how having a neutral partner managing a multi stakeholder collaboration can reduce the complexity of the task. It is further being emphasized how this leader should share the collective vision and goals of the collaboration and prioritize accordingly. Although an executive director may not be viewed as a neutral partner in the same sense as Blu Skye, assumptions can be made of how he would prioritize accordingly to the collective goal of the organization he is managing considering his leader role being at SAC, not with any individual member of the organization.

4.2.2 Getting the Right People on the Bus in the right seats

Jensen describes how large brands such as H&M, and Target got involved early in the process of SAC, and how they were hosting meetings even prior to when the organization had launched. She explains that the letter was sent out to the largest global fashion, sport and outdoor brands that Patagonia believed would understand the value of engaging in such an initiative. Although most of the respondents describe the reactions of those approached, as positive, a few mentioned how not all had the same understanding for what this could become. Hendrik Alpen, Sustainability Engagement Manager at H&M, describes how the company was working with sustainability reporting and communication, and how they were members of SAC in an early stage of the process, discussing the development of the Higg Index. “At this point, SAC was fairly new, but we had already started putting some efforts into it, discussing how much resources we should and would need to invest in it, and if we should prioritize it or not”, Alpen says. He goes on explaining how shortly after this discussion, the CEO of H&M gave an interview to a magazine, saying he wished there was a
way to compile all information in their sustainability report onto the garment in store and communicate it to the consumers. Describing how he was wishing there was an easy way that they could inform consumers about all necessary product information and attach it to the products in store. “And then we realized that this is exactly what we just discussed regarding the Higg Index, and what we just had put a question mark behind”, Alpen says emphasizing the irony. He further describes how it was made obvious to look further into this. An additional large brand which was involved early in the development of SAC is C&A, describes Sina Gerlach, Senior Project Manager at C&A. “We are one of the founding members of SAC, we joined in 2011”, she says. Catherine Louies, Project Manager of Global Sustainability at C&A, explains how although C&A believed strongly in the project, they did not manage to actively engage until after 3 years when they had enough resources from the sustainability department. Ridgeway however, explains how SAC has expanded every year since the very first version of the coalition was established and how they today represent about half of the entire volume of global production for apparel and footwear. He refers to SAC’s success in attracting new members each year as a result of how there is business value in the proposal.

*This is in alignment with how Elkington (1998) refers to the Triple Bottom Line theory and how collaborations investing in such will benefit from an easier transition towards investments in sustainability. However, at the same time, it further confirms the theory stating that the importance of sustainability often is being questioned and how sustainability seldom is being prioritized or initially viewed as something contributing with added business value (Elkington 1998; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). However, it seems as if long-term investments and engagement in these questions are increasing, judging from the development in size of SAC.*

Carbonaro explains how she was involved in the initial phase of SAC, and how she later joined when the Higg Index was starting to develop. “My role is to develop together with other colleagues of the industry, academia and NGOs, the Higg Index transparency communication strategy and the stakeholder’s engagement path”, she says. Carbonaro further describes how one of her additional roles is her engagement in the steering team of the Higg Index Transparency Communication, where they focus on the 2020 goal of full company transparency, and consumer communication. Jensen describes the governance and the establishment of specific guidance of these working groups (also referred to as teams) as one
of the key actions in the development of SAC. “Putting some of those key governance guidelines into place as quickly as possible helped provide some structure that was needed. Especially as you’re trying to wrangle all those different brands and competitors together”, she says. She explains further that although she thinks “Blu Skye did a fantastic job facilitating the group to a certain point”, it eventually became difficult for them trying to manage that big group in terms of the large development of size, and the level of discussion. She further highlights the financial aspect of having several consultants as unsustainable. She explains how they were in need of an executive director who could hire staff as soon as possible. “Because running ourselves down the ground would not set the organization up for success”, she says. She highlights how appointing an executive director to oversee the entire organization became a crucial decision. “Finding the right person for that job, getting Jason into that role [executive director] as soon as possible became a top priority”, she concludes.

To include academia and NGOs in collaborations aiming to achieve global sustainable systemic change is confirmed to be a crucial key decision considering their respective knowledge within the area, and their ability to affect this knowledge both through education and through putting pressure on government and bodies of legislation (Elkington 1998; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Grant & Baden-Fuller 2004). Nidumolu et. al (2014) refer to them as key players within sustainability focused collaborations. Regarding the importance of setting up guidelines and rules, Elkington (1998) confirm this as a key action for managing multiple perceptions and opinions, as such in a multi stakeholder collaboration.

4.3 Collaborative Organizational Culture

4.3.1 Getting the Right People on the Bus in the Right Seats then teaching them how to drive it.

“We’ve [SAC] had success every year attracting new members as there is business value in our proposal. It’s built around a vision of scaled environmental and social justice measurement”, Ridgeway says explaining the development of SAC over recent years. Carbonaro explains how Patagonia teaming up with Walmart inspired the rest of the industry. “It sent out a message, ‘let’s do it all together, the time is short so let’s do it now’”, she says explaining this as one of the reasons why she believes that many companies joined the project with open arms. “It was inspiring to not create an opposition between the gang of the good
and the gang of the bad - but rather just go straight for an alliance for the whole apparel industry”, Carbonaro explains. All respondents emphasize how the interest in SAC was high, and how many had realized how they weren’t far along, and how it was hard. “And those who felt they were far along, illustrated how little they knew”, Myette says. This created an additional willingness for collaboration. “It [SAC] tends to be more collaborative than any other initiative I’ve ever seen”, Myette says. Roberts agrees, emphasizing the broad impact of the outdoor industry as a key reason for this being. She explains how the people engaged in this industry often are highly dedicated to preserve the outdoors as their main interests of activities takes place in nature, allowing them to visibly recognize the impact of manufacturing apparel and textiles, and realize the great need for collaborating to reduce this impact. Several of the respondents state how collaborations has spread among the fashion and apparel industry over recent years. Myette refers to this as a receipt of success of SAC and the impact it has had on the industry. “[...] What I’m most proud about is our member companies, and specifically the people who work for them who are willing to give countless hours”, Roberts says. Myette agrees stating how “The SAC was founded on the back of the OIA”. “We didn’t have a lot of money in the project initially, but we did have a lot of what I call sweat equity”, Roberts says. Jensen explains how OIA brought their best practices to SAC and helped facilitate the collaboration process through their own previous years of experience of running precompetitive working groups. Carbonaro explains how multi stakeholder working groups have been created at SAC, which further have created the different Higg Index suite of tools and aligning them to all go in the same direction; inwardly in terms of self-assessment, and outwardly in terms of the Higg Index public communication. “The latter one already has a deadline of 2020”, Carbonaro says referring to the goal of 2020 having SAC member companies disclosing full transparency by communicating their Higg Index score to consumers.

*It could be interpreted how OIA constituted that initial smaller group of key players, as mentioned by Nidumolu et. al (2014). And how they, the key players, similarly to how the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) describes it, created a clear vision for their common goal and how to reach it while having the collaboration grow and foster a precompetitive organizational culture. Robert’s assumptions of the outdoor industry’s great impact on this collaborative approach and their understanding for its importance, is confirmed by how retailers and brands hold a great influential power of collaborative ways to reduce impact, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017). Spekman, Isabella and MacAvoy*
(2000) describing how collaborative relationships aim to accomplish goals impossible to reach individually seems to correlate with the above description of SAC. Also, it relates with Steinhilber’s (2008) description of how significant and sustainable value can be achieved through a combination of resources collaborating.

4.3.2 Industry Collaboration through Democratic Organizational Culture

When discussing the collaborative aspect of the organization, all respondents confirm how the collaborative organization culture has characterized the work and development of SAC.

“The collaboration is incredible […]. Seeing those members who sometimes are direct competitors getting together and focus on the big picture and how to make the best tool. Everyone kind of becomes friends when they’re working on the SAC work which is really nice.”

(Julie M.H. Brown, Product Manager, SAC)

“One principle which was used from the beginning, and before they [SAC] were a legal entity; it was the Collaboration principle, everyone had a voice, and there were democracy decision processes. […]. When all stakeholders are participating in these meeting, you hear the entire world speak, it has a really interesting intangible affect. You widen your perspective, and create awareness for other people, other countries, other realities.”

(Karin Ekberg, Managing Director, Leadership & Sustainability)

“SAC basically works on collaborative industry solutions, such as topics that individual retailers wouldn’t be able to solve only by themselves. So, the main motivation for us [C&A] participating in the SAC is at the end of the day, everyone working in the industry with those tools, will profit from the work that we have done together.

(Sina Gerlach, Senior Project Manager, C&A)

“When it comes to the SAC and the membership of it, I think many companies and industries see value in a standardized measurement […]. It enables interaction with suppliers, reduce of resources and by collaborating and developing this tool all together, they don’t have to build it themselves.”

(Hendrik Alpen, Sustainability Engagement Manager, H&M)
“It’s always relied on the collaboration around the members, and the expectation that the members will provide people from their companies to work to develop the tools, so that they feel ownership of the tools. And it still is. The members themselves are working with the SAC staff, to continue to develop the tools.”

(Rick Ridgeway, VP Public Affairs, Patagonia)

However, a few respondents also highlight how although collaboration has been a constant core value in theory, it has not always been as easy in practice. Myette explains further; “It was founded as a membership inclusive and collaborative initiative, but in reality, it was much harder to comply with this, and to lower your guard before your competitor. This has evolved over time”. Brown confirms the fact that it has been taking a lot of work and time, trying to navigate all needs and assuring each member is considering the needs of the industry, not the needs of their company.

Nidumolu et. al (2014) refer to how individual needs being prioritized over collective ones in industry collaborations are one of the most common factors for them to fail along with a lack of trust. Especially when the collaboration is dealing with complex systemic challenges. Here a strong connection can be identified between the important concerns mentioned by Brown, and what Nidumolu et. al (2014) refer to as common factors for collaborative failure. The authors further emphasize the importance of establishing trust in between partners. This could be interpreted as additionally important in this case where the partners sometimes are direct competitors. In addition to this, Spekman, Isabella and MacAvoy (2000) further underline the essence of a collaborative relationship being focused on accomplishing mutually compatible goals collectively.

“You need to be willing to sometimes find compromise for the benefit on the larger thing, and you need to bring individual commitment to the table. It’s a lot about being comfortable working with people who also are your competitors. But also, you need to be OK with making compromise with regards to what you want to achieve.”

(Sina Gerlach, Senior Project Manager C&A)

Ekberg agrees, explaining how you need to consider the perspectives of others but yourself, underlining the manufacturer’s perspective as an important part together with the need for harmonization within the entire supply chain. All respondents mention the importance of multi stakeholder collaboration as how to succeed with SAC’s mission of harmonization and
standardization. Ridgeway gives an example of how this multi stakeholder approach is present not only by SAC membership but also by the work when building the tools. He refers to how the chemical impact module of the tool measuring environmental impact of factories, was built by the US-based Natural Resources Defense Council for example. He explains how it has been a multi stakeholder initiative from the beginning, with companies, NGOs, universities and so on. Underlining how the tools are built by the many stakeholders in the organization. Gerlach emphasizes how collaboration is key for any company working within the textile industry. “Especially when we talk about industry challenges, no company by itself can change any of these underlying systemic issues. We need to work together, and collaborate, not only with other brands but with our supply chain partners, affiliates, with our NGOs. It’s a joint effort”, she says. Louies explains how this has evolved over time within SAC, explaining how Europe has started to play a bigger role with a lot of focus on European legislation, NGOs and government pushing for these types of questions. Brown agrees, explaining how along with the growth of SAC, more different types of companies joined along with service providers and NGOs. She emphasizes how a wider variety of different kinds of members involved in the process has affected the organizations development. Jensen underlines how this growth has thought them a lot and how the first period brought them many learning lessons such as committing consensus in key decision points for example. She explains how it was a very time-consuming process at first. Alpen is of the same opinion explaining how still today it can be a bit frustrating not being able to excel faster.

“You know how they say sometimes ‘If you want to go fast you got to go slow, if you want to go high, you got to go low’, well sometimes you got to go together. We all need to work together when aiming to work for reducing our impact, implementing benchmarking etc. But, we [H&M] want to go faster.”

(Hendrik Alpen, Sustainability Engagement Manager H&M)

In addition to the obvious connections with theory expressing the need for collaborating for the greater cause, it more precisely relates with the theory about an equal partnership where all voices should be made heard (Elkington 1998; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Further it can be found how the ability to place yourself in another person’s shoes is brought up both by several interviewed respondents and in theory by Elkington (1998). The emphasis seems to be placed on key actions for a successful collaboration including all stakeholders, meanwhile considering all stakeholders varied pre-conditions. An example being the individual versus the collective ability to excel speed. Further the findings of NGOs evolved
role in connection to these questions, putting pressure on legislation are confirmed by several authors emphasizing their key role in multi stakeholder collaborations (Elkington 1998; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Nidumolu et. al 2014).

4.3.2.1 Learning How to Collaborate with Your Competitors

Brown emphasizes the importance of ensuring how all members feel ownership over the tools and that they are providing with solutions. Ekberg agrees while emphasizing how there has been a shift of mindset within the industry in general. She explains the result as an ease of collaboration and comfort level of speaking with each other. Myette explains how this collaborative mindset has evolved and how they have become much more collaborative and further improved the clarity of their language and established trust, which he refers to as a key barrier they had to overcome. “Before you didn’t want to share your best projects but today all are contributing very freely, and there are very few barriers for this today”, Carbonaro says. She explains how the multi stakeholder approach forces them to find a common ground where the different interests find a point of convergence. “It is mesmerizing to think about the big impact that you can create”, Carbonaro says. Roberts agrees, underlining the importance of strong relations and how they today have a consistent core world of brands, retailers, and suppliers who now have been working together for several years trying to tackle the question of impact. “We also recognize that we’re [OIA] a really small part of the apparel and footwear supply chain and so to really get change, create change that lead to impact it would need the larger apparel and footwear industry to be a part of that”, she says again emphasizing the need for collaborations. Although collaboration is mentioned as a key factor for reaching progress, both Myette and Alpen are criticizing SAC for not progressing fast enough, referring to the organization as too consensus focused. Ekberg agrees, explaining the need for harmonization where it is not too democratic, or too rigid but leaving some space for individual paths as well. However, Myette applauds SAC for moving from a place of not collaborative to very collaborative. Several respondents emphasize how SAC early on implemented practices inspired by both REI and OIA which helped foster this collaborative approach and the nimble organizational culture adapted within SAC today.

An alignment could be identified between Alpen, Ekberg and Myette’s criticism of SAC being too focused on all stakeholders and competitors getting along, and how sustainable
development focused initiatives often revolve around long-term goals over quick wins, as mentioned by Nidumolu et. al (2014). The risk being how a too consensus focused collaboration would risk losing momentum and credibility among both internal and external partners and stakeholders. The authors underline how visible and immediate results are definitive in business, and if incorporating the triple bottom line theory by Elkington (1998), a multi stakeholder collaboration such as SAC should be no exception to this rule. However, when considering the size of this global collaboration, and its’ aim of representing a democratic and equal partnership, the desire of excelling the speed might be a bit too ambitious. Yet it seems as if they would need to identify a solution to the complexity of being able to demonstrate quick wins, and not lose momentum, while keeping all voices heard and proceeding with development in agreement of these.

However, there is a broad differentiation on how companies operate and of how their business models varies depending if they represent fast fashion, high street, luxury, or sports brands. Jensen explains the biggest challenge with development and implementation of the index to concern the fundamental concepts on which various businesses in the fashion apparel industry are based, and how they are not used to working with each other. Myette explains how he sometimes experience a division between members explaining how different values and agendas among members can be difficult to tackle in an international global collaboration.

“You’re always experiencing tension, but we learn during the journey what is the imperative action to be implemented right away and what are the actionable and aspirational goals to be achieved. That happens when you bring industry, science, and the civil society (e.g. NGOs) at the same table. Naturally there is always tension in a multi stakeholder approach, but SAC is based on that challenge.”

(Simonetta Carbonaro, Consumer Psychologist, The Swedish School of Textiles)

Gerlach explains how they have taken learnings from the environmental and social world by setting up one set of requirements for the supply chain and focused on setting up a system which is more effective in terms of driving change, but which is also less impactful on resources. She further refers to how the fashion industry in general has contributed with several industry initiatives over the recent decade as this is a key strategy for driving change. The SAC, the Organic Cotton Accelerator, The ZDHC Group (Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals), are all groups that came together on precompetitive level and on different topics.
When you look at what could be done in a global collaboration that runs well and is based on science and rewards through the incentives of public disclosure and clarity, you will receive great behavior. You will far surpass any law in any jurisdiction on the planet.”

(Kevin Myette, Director, Bluesign Technologies)

Perry (2013) confirms the complexity of varied global brands with varied global business models and ways of operating to unite and work collectively. However, connections could be drawn to how the concern for this complexity could risk resulting in the corporate monkey traps mentioned by Elkington (1998). Instead of focusing on the complexity with what separates the varied ways of operating, the key action could be suggested to constitute of the partners and companies within the collaboration to embrace the potentials made available through change. This is how to optimize new partnerships and collaborations and allow all stakeholders to benefit from them (Elkington 1998). Further, precompetitive industry-initiatives can provide with enormous influence and execute rapid change through its global presence leading to direct impact (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). This in contradiction to government initiatives and legislation which processes often are more time demanding, according to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), sympathizing with Myette’s thoughts regarding this matter, and how collaboration can help foster industry standards and laws.

4.3.2.2 An Equal Partnership

Roberts emphasizes how she is of the opinion that the added resources to SAC, both in terms of members and staff, were needed in order to develop the tools explaining how this was a costly process. However, it was important to ensure that the smaller medium brands and the outdoor industry did not get swallowed by the broader global fashion and sports brands when all collaborating within SAC. Yet the over-representation of larger global brands is expressed as a challenge by several respondents, explaining how smaller brands have limited resources in terms of staff dedicated to sustainability work. Jensen explains how as the organization grew, it was a bit of a ‘rocky path’ ensuring all voices were heard and that there was not going to be a cost-prohibitive price being put on the tools. She goes on explaining how these top concerns by OIA then were taken well into consideration by SAC, who helped facilitate the integration of the SME’s and the outdoor perspective. Brown describes how SAC decided to tackle the over-representation of larger brands by introducing an SME model, allowing
smaller and medium sized companies to access the Higg Index for a lower cost and how they must not necessarily become members of SAC. “They can still get support though, and they can still use the tools. So, through that we’ve seen a few small brands sign up and that’s definitely how we’re trying to engage the smaller companies as they make a huge part of the industry and it’s important to get them involved”, she says.

Both Roberts and Jensen discuss the North American and European heritage of SAC and Jensen express how it is still present in SAC today to some extent. She refers to how it has been hard to incorporate all the supply chain voices due to time zones and language barriers. She explains textile mills in China as a particular example of really important players since many years, who still are not represented enough. “Certainly, a number of suppliers have been involved but mostly it’s been those that are somewhat westernized I would say, so it’s those really big suppliers that have factory managers who are fluent in English and have representation in North America or Europe or similar”, she says. “Because of this, scaling these tools out to those really in-country factories in China and Vietnam and all of these places has been a consistent challenge”, Jensen explains. Roberts emphasizes how there is a lot of discussions surrounding the ‘equal partnership’ between supplier and customer. She explains that this is hard to resolve, explaining how a buyer relationship inherently is unequal while emphasizing how there now is an understanding for how to achieve change through change further down the supply chain. Myette agrees, stating how SAC must struggle with the buy/sell relationship each day and how it further affects the opportunities for mutual trust throughout the supply chain. Jensen however underlines how the equal partnership is difficult to achieve due to the imbalance of representation in meetings where important suppliers in China and Vietnam are absent in the discussion. “[...] but I know that’s been a really big focus for the SAC and something that they’re really working on”, she says. Gerlach indicates that when you have a group as large as SAC, you must remain your expectations of the collaborative level realistic. “There will be suppliers at the table but how far they represent the average SME supply companies is another question, because you need to have the resources, the knowledge, the interest, the expertise to be able to participate, and that is already a certain group of the supply chain”, she says. Gerlach explains how SAC are aware of how getting the SMEs to the table is a key factor and an important part of changing the industry considering they represent the majority of it.
The extended collaboration highlighted by Nidumolu et. al (2014) is supposed to include stakeholders from both business and non-corporations, much similar to SAC, and more importantly it is illustrated as a partnership where every stakeholder has a voice. However, strategies for how to incorporate each voice of such a broad and global collaboration such as SAC seems to be difficult even for theory to identify. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) emphasize how the issue is not the lack of collaborations, but rather how to coordinate them. Poldner (2013) also highlights this issue being present in global broad collaborations, while Bruce, Daly and Towers (2004) emphasize how all partners should aim to seek solutions benefiting the goal of the organization. Kozar and Hiller Connell (2016) underline the unfair wages often being present further down the supply chain. This could be perceived as a first very basic step towards an equal partnership; fair wages across the entire supply chain empowering all stakeholders within the industry and contributing with improved pre-conditions for equal partnerships within global multi stakeholder collaborations. After all, sustainable development is repeatedly being emphasized as a three-pillar theory, interconnecting all categories and the actions of their stakeholders. This should further indicate that SMEs who incorporate sustainable development in their business should have the same ability to actively engage in sustainability focused collaborations.

4.4 Striving for Global Sustainable Development...

4.4.1 Good for Business

At one point in each interview, we touch the subject of how global sustainable development is good for business and how this must become more emphasized and acknowledged. Both Carbonaro and Ridgeway highlight how SAC is not only providing solutions for sustainable development improvement but rather how these solutions and improvements are bringing innovation and business value to the member brands and companies. “It’s lowering risks in the supply chain, increasing sustainability commitment, and increasing brand value. Further equity fund managers as well as banks are starting to support companies with sustainability commitment as its increasing the stock value, and again the business value”, Ridgeway explains. Carbonaro emphasizes how the Higg Index tells you where to put the Best Available Innovation (BAI), in the value chain. “This is for instance an aspect that we brought to the attention of the investor sector in another workshop we made with SAC in Paris in April 2017”, she says. Both Carbonaro and Ridgeway underline how the Higg Index is in fact a tool
that can help the investors’ sector both in terms of risk management and in terms of innovation potential while they are evaluating their investees.

Similarly, to what is being expressed above, Nidumolu et. al (2014) confirm how sustainability measurement tools such as the Higg Index inspires capital investment decisions through driving profitable operational change and sustainable development. Blissick et. al (2017) explain this as a result of industry stakeholders putting pressure on the environmental performance of brands and retailers within the industry, and thus contributing with increased expectations, which the market must meet. Cao. et al (2014) indicate how the fashion industry is affecting the social and environmental pillar of sustainable development, but if taking the multibillion numbers into consideration (Dean, Lane & Tärneberg 2017), it should be safe to say how sustainable development in the fashion industry also affects the economic pillar and can be viewed very much as an investment.

All respondents agree upon the fact that there is a lack of ways on how to measure success in terms of sustainable development, and how sustainability often is considered as a positive *addition* but how a company’s success mainly is measured in terms of economic success. It is being emphasized by several respondents how sustainable development and solutions for such should be embedded in a company’s success, and not be reduced to only being a positive separate part. Ridgeway underlines how this is starting to change saying; “It’s happening now in the companies that are using the Higg Index. They’re all finding that it’s adding business value”. Gerlach agrees, while emphasizing how the collaborative aspect plays its part in the reason for this being. She underlines how there is a clear trend of brands becoming increasingly collaborative when striving to achieve sustainable development progress. “SAC is one example of this, but there are so many initiatives, such as ZDHC, ACT or the Bangladesh Accord. They saw that you could have an even greater impact if you do it together with the supply chain, and I think at the end of the day it’s about that, about driving change, and the effects of driving change as that’s what we are going for”, Gerlach says. Roberts is of the same opinion stating how there has been a shift from individual efforts to joint such. Discussing the SAC and its success she says; “I think people really bought into this idea that it was better to come up with a uniform standard but that it was going to be difficult, and time consuming and costly so no one, no organization had the capacity to do it alone”. Brown further explains this as one of the reasons for why she believes the increased growth of SAC members has not been too difficult. “I think the industry is really inspired by what the
SAC does and inspired by the collaboration they’re seeing within the SAC and they want to be a part of that”, she says. Myette highlights how the SAC membership proposal is about gatherings and working for a collaborative industry, rather than personal agenda for the success of your brand or business. He is clear to underline how you must engage with and within SAC and the work that they do for you as a brand or a business to reach that added business value being discussed. “It means nothing to just be a part of the SAC. The membership fee is the smallest contribution that I make, I’m giving you my time, which is way more valuable”, Myette says while emphasizing how this view still must become more widely understood among companies within the industry.

Elkington (1998) confirms the suggestion of sustainability not being incorporated as a part of the measurement of economic success, explaining it similarly as the interview respondents. However, Nidumolu et. al (2014) underline the financial benefits which the Higg Index contributes with through both environmental and financial resource reductions of fabric waste and improved design solutions and manufacturing investments. Demonstrating how sustainable development investments can provide with economic such, and how they are interrelated, also confirmed by the suggestion of Kareiva et. al (2015). Ultimately, business is playing a key role in the transition process towards increasing sustainability within the fashion and textile industry, and large-scale, precompetitive, multi stakeholder cross-value collaborations constitute a great part of how to drive this change while allowing business to benefit from this transition (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Gerlach’s statement about how new innovative collaborations working for sustainable development are increasing, is supported by Elkington (1998). He emphasizes the increasing opportunities for unexpected collaborations being fostered by the increasing awareness and demands for sustainable development. If fashion in fact is reflecting our times (Dean, Lane & Tärneberg 2017), this development seems accurate and most highly needed to avoid the continued race to the bottom, as expressed by Blissick et. al (2017).

Ridgeway emphasizes how he believes other governments and other business categories will take notice and drive replication. “If that happens, we can have a scale global case in a way consumer goods are manufactured and distributed today”, he says. “I think the other interesting next step is that there is a recognition that solutions are likely going to come from the private sector”, Roberts says referring to breakthroughs of new technologies, textiles and chemistry. Ekberg and Myette both express a similar opinion explaining how business is
stepping up and solving problems, explaining how the SAC initiative drives this impact in a positive way in the entire industry, pushing for sustainability and challenging other companies in the industry.

“We may have retreated from the Paris agreement, but the business is still in! Government is potentially less powerful than business. The future should be a public private partnership because when business gets aligned, the ability to create change exceeds any government.”

(Kevin Myette, Director, Bluesign Technologies)

While Carbonaro mentions how the interplay between small and large companies is an additional factor for success of sustainable development collaborations within the fashion industry, such as SAC, she also emphasizes the interplay between the industry and policy makers. She highlights the importance of SAC being a part of the environmental and social decision-making today, not only at EU Commission and in the European Parliament, but also at OECD level. “It’s a wise decision to also take care of the scaling-up dimension. No massive transformation can happen without policy making, that forces the whole industry to follow the same rules”, she says. Carbonaro refers to the SAC policy team’s engagement in supporting the journey of the EU-commission and of the OECD. “Working with the policy makers, giving them the right angle of looking at the industry’s sustainability challenge is very crucial”, she says while emphasizing how the ongoing push of the civil society through their NGOs especially in Europe, is crucial. Gerlach agrees saying; “We need to work together, and collaborate, not only with other brands but with our supply chain partners, affiliations and with our NGOs. It’s a joint effort”. She explains how this goes for any company working in an industry which is experiencing challenges.

“When you make changes it’s always very impactful to work together, and much more impactful than any other company could achieve individually. [...] No company by itself can change any of these underlying systemic issues. [...] At the end of the day, it is precompetitive collaboration inventing how to set up a system which is more effective in terms of driving change, but which is also less impactful on resources.”

(Sina Gerlach, Senior Project Manager, C&A)

Here some respondents express different opinions regarding which sector that potentially could drive change in the most effective way. Kareiva et. al (2015) confirm the suggestions of
how the private sector to a large extent is influencing the global commerce, and why they therefore must be considered an essential part of the global development process. However, what collectively is being highlighted by the respondents is the importance of interplay between all stakeholders, industries, and sectors, and how they must become aligned within these questions to achieve global results. This is supported by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), encouraging multi stakeholder and cross-value collaborations globally as how to drive change. Further Elkington (1998) confirms the fact that NGOs have started to realize the value and influence business hold, why more collaborative multi stakeholder initiatives should be seen, incorporating all voices.

Carbonaro amplifies the aspect of precompetitive collaboration between all parties, explaining how there are several aspects which yet are not included in the Higg Index, with emphasis on yet. She refers to animal welfare and veganism having grown hugely among people’s instances. She believes these to be aspects which will be included in the Higg Index within the near future but meanwhile encourages companies to start developing ways of working with these aspects independently from the Higg Index state of art. “Using the Higg Index for measuring your performances does not mean that you cannot make additional improvements”, she says. She is emphasizing how you constantly must review the work that you do and on top of the Higg Index consider what else makes you different. Carbonaro refers to the example of Patagonia having enlightened durability as a main sustainability factor and how that aspect then was embedded into the Higg Index through quantifiable quality criteria. “It’s more difficult to embed aspects of end of use as repairing, upcycling, etc., but in spite of that, those dimensions were also integrated in the Higg Index”, she says. Carbonaro goes on saying; “In general one has to understand the Higg Index approach as a pragmatic and incremental one”.

All respondents put a lot of emphasis on the importance of SAC’s work with the Higg Index and underlines the usefulness for the industry and the sustainable development. “It could prove to be extremely useful and important because it will lower the environmental footprint and improve the social injustice of the entire industry. And it promises to be able to prove that in a way that is measurable”, Ridgeway says.

Considering the definition of sustainable development being about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future generations’ ability to meet their needs (WCED 1987), Carbonaro’s encouragement of constant scrutiny for improvements seems obvious. Also, the explanation of the pragmatic and incremental approach to the implementation of the
Higg Index makes sense considering its focus on sustainable development. A strong connection between Carbonaro’s emphasis on seeking business value through constant development and challenging your abilities, and the theoretical example of the dairy industry can be identified. As Nidumolu et. al (2014) explained, the dairy industry faced many challenges when pressure from several stakeholders demanded the industry to reduce its carbon footprint. However, through the power of collaboration and innovative ways of identifying potential business value, the industry turned the challenges around. Instead of perceiving changes purely as negative and costly, the industry managed to convert challenges into beneficial opportunities including the full triple bottom line approach. Knowing how the dairy industry managed to tackle the increased pressure and demands by various parties of interest, it inspires hope for how additional industries should be able to do the same. Further Ridgeway’s desire of how SAC’s success with the Higg Index might inspire replication and drive further change, does not seem impossible. Challenging your present demands even further might contribute with additional revenue and success.

4.5 The Fashion, Apparel and Textile Supply Chain

4.5.1 The Impact of Production

“How do you drive change in a macro complex environment?”, is one of the questions Alpen decides to lead with when entering the conversation concerning the impact of production.

The respondents agree around how there is a need for standardized measurements within the textile supply chain. They discuss the need for harmonization and an equal partnership and further emphasize how trustworthy standards, improved communication, and transparency throughout the entire supply chain could assist with this. Roberts elaborates; “There was a recognition by the vast majority, how the environmental footprint that occurs is really in the product, in the manufacturing of the product”. She explains further how people producing textile and apparel have recognized that the largest impact is in the materials, making the decisions in this part of the supply chain process vital along with how you manage the textile mill process. She explains how trying to influence supply chains is a complex, but necessary task. “Because you know, textile mills are one of the biggest polluters of clean water worldwide”, Roberts says.
“The theory for the SAC when we founded it was that we would develop a set of tools that measure both the social justice impact and the environmental footprint of the industry’s entire value chain. And if we standardized the tool and had a system for verifying the data from the supply chain, and then we made the measurements transparent and open to the public, we would activate drivers in the apparel and footwear systems, that would affect all the other players in the ecosystem to lower environmental impact and increase social justice.”

(Rick Ridgeway, VP, Patagonia)

The textile supply chain needs discussed by the respondents correlates to a high extent with how sustainable supply chain management (SSCM) is being described by Gupta and Palsule-Desai (2011). It also confirms the several theories stating how the fashion, apparel and textile industry must increase incorporation of CSR and SSCM-solutions (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Kaiser 2012; Perry 2013; Young, Jirousek & Ashdown 2004). Dickson, Eckman and Loker (2009) are confirming the highly water- and energy demanding production processes in the textile supply chain as mentioned by Roberts. In further detail, the design aspect being brought up by the respondents has to a large extent been the focal point of the discussion for SSC-solutions also in theory. Young, Jirousek & Ashdown (2004) emphasize the relevance of the design stage in the supply chain, and how considerations regarding material, designs and resources in this stage can have tremendous effect on the environmental impact. This is further supported by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), adding how common industry guidelines could support with incorporation of minimal requirements in the design process. Further this could apply to the transparency being discussed by Ridgeway, increasing awareness of industry stakeholders and decision makers and resulting in reduction of impact.

4.5.2 The Need for Harmonization

Alpen explains how the discussion regarding how to make sustainability measurable and benchmarkable had gone on for quite some time, and if there would be an answer on how to succeed with this everyone would essentially benefit from it. “All the time we try to look over our KPIs, How do our results look like, is it good? How does it compare? Can it compare? What does it mean to the consumer, and what could it come to mean if we could find a tool enabling this benchmarking?”, Alpen says. All respondents are aligned around the fact that the Higg Index through SAC brings harmonization to the industry in a way that has not been
present earlier. Ekberg emphasizes the harmonization within the industry through the canalization of resources into using the same tools. She explains it as a big advantage, especially within the social area, when referring to suppliers suffering of fatigue audits according to several different protocols. She denominates the textile supply chain as a spider web when aiming to illustrate its complexity. Further both she and Gerlach underline how a supplier may cater to everything in between 20-30 brands, emphasizing the chaos that could be created if each of every brand made an audit visit at once. “We need to build one tool, not have every company develop a tool each”, Ekberg says emphasizing the facilitation also from the consumer aspect. Jensen agrees explaining how they all share the same factories, in regardless if you are a fashion apparel company or an outdoor industry one, common factories is a common fact.

These concerns are strengthened by the theory emphasizing the many benefits of having a united, universal and standardized measurement tool (Cao et. al 2014; Chouinard, Ellison & Ridgeway 2011; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Kozar & Hiller Connell 2013). Excessive auditing and policing of suppliers catering to several brands and retailers being one of the benefits with implementing a global standardized way of measurement, reducing the need of resources (Cao et. al 2014; Dickson, Eckman & Loker 2009; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Gereffi & Frederick 2010; Nidumolu et. al 2014; Ross 2004).

Gerlach explains further how several different indications from several different companies to one single supplier sets this supplier up for failure, and the audits fail to fulfil its purpose of improvements. There is no clear message. In addition to this issue, she illustrates the importance of an equal partnership, where brands are working with the supply chain, a crucial factor for SAC. She explains how this will result in the ability of sharing audits in between each other within the industry, facilitating the partnership. “So, if there is one audit and it was set up by C&A, the suppliers still own their audit results, and could choose to share their audit results with H&M, Inditex or similar”, Gerlach explains emphasizing how this would be less resource demanding as only one auditor would be needed. This would be more efficient for all parties involved. Carbonaro too brings up how SAC prioritizes the work of reaching an equal partnership among stakeholders. She explains how the geographic location of most of the suppliers is one of the crucial reasons for why to actively work with this equal partnership, ensuring that the manufacturer’s voices are heard loud and clear in spite of their location. “Global was always the destination so this is important”, she says. She refers to how the Facility tool was the first one that got finished and ready to go public, thanks to the
manufacturer’s completion of work in time. She goes on explaining how the goal is to go public with the Brand, Retail and Facility Transparency tools all together, why the Facility tool is still waiting for the others to be completed. She adds; “Asian Manufacturers said once in a plenary meeting: ‘There will come a day when we will assess the brands and the retailers we want to work with’. And that shows how advanced manufacturers are and how ready they are for the change”.

The large emphasis being placed on the need for harmonization and an equal partnership throughout the entire supply chain is by theory confirmed as a crucial key factor for increasing sustainability within the fashion and textile industry. However, most authors discuss the current situation consisting of worker exploitation resulting in child labor, sweatshop catastrophes, unfair wages and unfair working conditions (Ekström 2015; Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Kaiser 2012; Kozar & Hiller Connell 2013; Perry 2013). Bruce, Daly and Towers (2004) therefore emphasize how stakeholders controlling these supply chains must realize their production process’ social impact, and further how changes of these processes will affect the workers. Masson et. al (2007) stand critical to this transformation, specifying how high street fashion brand will face additional challenges due to their business models being built on quick lead times and low costs. They further emphasize the complexity of these brands’ global sourcing networks, and how this will aggravate the already existing challenges for this sort of systemic transformation. This is one very specific reason for why alignment and coordination are being emphasized as a necessity also within a global industry network (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Considering the vast differences of the painted pictures of suppliers and workers’ present reality, illustrated by theory, versus their potential future, illustrated by Gerlach, it seems as if harmonization should be a key factor to focus on if aiming to illuminate one of these illustrations.

“Within the industry and within the company [H&M] there is a need for harmonization. Harmonizing what we ask our suppliers, how to work with them. This tool could contribute with that and implementing a standardized measurement would help by reducing depletion, and freeing resources. It would further assist in the problems we see today on how we work with pure auditing and policing your suppliers. This could be done better, by the help of the Higg Index, and on a more specific level with the need of fewer resources.”

(Hendrik Alpen, Sustainability Engagement Manager, H&M)
Alpen emphasizes how it allows for interaction with suppliers and by collaborating and developing this tool all together no one needs to do all the hard work alone. Gerlach agrees, saying how she believes how it could lead to better acceptance of tools, questions asked, and topics of issues in the entire industry. “Because it’s a different mindset when you develop something together”, she says explaining the increased appreciation and ownership you feel over something you helped develop. Gerlach explains how this hopefully would evolve all stakeholders, meeting the needs not only of the brands but also of the supply partners eliminating the former one-way relationship where brands oppose things on suppliers, and they report back. “In an ideal world there would be suppliers going out using their results to find other customers, and to actively approach others and saying, ‘look what we’ve done, look what you can do’”, she says.

The assumption of how collective development resulting in a shared ownership being able to lead towards better outcomes, is confirmed by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017). The authors emphasize how an equal partnership consisting of stakeholders feeling collective ownership over a project will result in stronger commitment and engagement and motivation to reach the common goal. However, this originates in the idea of all stakeholders feeling included and taking collective ownership, which on a manufacturer level in a global supply chain may be questioned. Yet the inspiring idea of Gerlach illustrating the future result of successful implementation of the Higg Index being suppliers selecting brands to work with might not be that far away after all. Nidumolu et. al (2014) illustrate how some brands and retailers already have incorporated the Higg Index into their supplier scorecard and base their supplier selection accordingly to their score. Must the opposite approach really be that far away if an equal partnership really is what is being prioritized from now on?

Alpen goes further on emphasizing how the equal partnership also should be integrated between departments and organizations. He explains how H&M works with this by integrating the sourcing organization, the buyers, and the marketing department, all looking at the functions of the Higg Index, how to use it and how to implement it. Alpen says they drive the work of implementing the Higg Index in their supply chain continuously, as it is critical in its functionality for H&M. Although Roberts illustrates the vast differences between how fast fashion companies and outdoor companies operate, she explains how the Higg Index can be adaptable as it is designed so that individual brands can focus where it would be most meaningful to them.
4.5.3 Standards

“The history of standards is that they are good instruments for aligning all of what the industry is doing in a comparable and fair competitiveness”, Carbonaro concludes. Roberts clarifies; “The Higg Index is not a standard, but a scoring system based on the convergence of all the main existing standards. It is the result of a holistic approach to sustainability for that reason”. She explains further; “The Higg Index simplifies through measurements what it means -in terms of scores- to use Best Available Technology (BAT), and it is dynamic, it gets revised, it is actionable and aspirational at the same time”.

When discussing the main advantages for creating the Higg Index through SAC, Myette explains; “Being excellent and great at sustainability, there’s no measurement for the success of that. There’s only: ‘I’m a great brand, and I’m sustainable too’, but this should be synonyms”. The majority of the respondents explain how there is no clear way to talk about a brand’s overall sustainability. “We only talk about numbers in terms of success. This will change with the Higg Index”, Myette says. Roberts explains how the development of a uniform measurement system is one crucial action for solving this, explaining further how the next step should be to communicate this to the consumer through a label. “Single industry standards save time and money, save time for working on improvement and impact instead of auditing, and also using it for your transparency to be feasible”, Louies says. She explains how standardization of tools could facilitate the drive of change through working together and through better engagement with your stakeholders. Ekberg agrees, referring to how it also would be beneficial from a legislator point of view. “Show legislators that you have one tool in place, and it’s the same”, she says explaining how this would bring advantages to all stakeholders, including consumers and the requirements of them being limited to only understand one tool of communication. Roberts explains how with the help of the Higg Index, SAC has been able to affect and bring input to EU’s labeling efforts under different legislative bodies. “Because we have this tool we’ve been able to help shape those so that they don’t end up being something that’s not really driving towards improvement”, Roberts says. Gerlach mentions how C&A are active in the auditing team of the Facility Environmental Module as they will be using that to assess suppliers against the Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemical Goal, a collaborative initiative between brands, value chain affiliates, and associates. Brown also brings up the Product Development Footprint being discussed within the European Commission, saying; “If this would become regulation, the industry needs a tool trying to
calculate that for them, quickly and scalable”. She explains how having internal sources doing this work is difficult which is why SAC wants to provide the industry with that kind of tool, viewing the potential of regulations as the big motivator. She goes on emphasizing the importance of learning from the Product Development Footprint process, what are their weaknesses, their strengths and how can they apply this knowledge and create a tool according to this information. She goes on explaining how SAC had the ability of giving their input if there was something with the methodology that they did not approve of and wanted to change, and how they also gave those recommendations to the European Commission. “So, that got the board to say yes let’s go ahead with this tool, it’s time for it. It’s part of the 2020 vision of our organization”, she says referring to how they will have a final full member vote regarding this tool, this summer [2018].

To successfully reach large-scale systemic change as the desire described above, it seems global alignment and collaboration cannot be stressed enough. However, what needs to be further emphasized is the challenge of successfully implementing these standards in all steps of the supply chain (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; Nidumolu et. al 2014). For this reason, the several cross-sector and cross-value collaborations mentioned above could be interpreted as a profound attempt of ensuring global implementation throughout all regions and all levels of the supply chain. It further correlates well with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s (2017) suggestions of innovative global system solutions working for new global industry standards.

This could further assist in the complexity stressed by Chouinard, Ellison and Ridgeway (2011), of how the current alarming numbers of third-party standards and certifications both overlap with one another, leave consumers confused and exposed with too many options, and yet only cover parts of a product’s impact. This confirms the need for a standardized measurement tool providing a holistic view of the entire production process, and its impact. Might it even be one of the key reasons for its so far success, providing the market with what yet did not exist. Taking into consideration how O’Rourke’s (2014) statement of the LCA measurement tool often being referred to as time demanding and expensive. Chouinard, Ellison and Ridgeway (2011) confirm the Higg Index to be profitable for all stakeholders within the industry, providing a holistic view produced from LCA-efforts but including several relevant categories. Let us not forget about its key selling point being how it inspires and drive change among competitors through measuring the negative impact of stakeholders, and
their efforts of improvements (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). This is further what Nidumolu et. al (2014) refer to as the best way of improving global CSR. SAC’s aim to change ‘the race to the bottom’ to ‘the race to the top’, is something also being highlighted by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) and is additionally persuading due to the Higg Index being referred to by literature as the most extensive and representative transparency measurement tool currently existing within the fashion, apparel and textile industry (Eder-Hansen et. al 2017).

4.6 How it all continues

4.6.1 Striving for Global Sustainable Development = Good for Business

“An industry that has no unnecessary environmental harm and has a positive impact on the people and the communities associated with the industry”. This is how most of the respondents answered when asked to describe their vision for SAC. It rhymes well with SAC’s official communicated vision and was the starting point of the following presented chapter. “The vision is simple, we’re going to change from the race to the bottom, to the race to the top”, Myette says while emphasizing; “Only by so SAC can succeed in inspiring other industries to follow its example”.

Ridgeway explains that since they started this initiative 8 years ago, they have grown so that they represent about half of the entire volume of global production for apparel and footwear. Further they have achieved success regarding the environmental impact of factories in the supply chain. He goes on explaining how they’ve starting to achieve protocols for verification, and a road map for transparency has been set. Yet all respondents agree around how the Higg Index needs to be further broadly adapted, implemented, and accepted as a standardized index to fulfil its purpose of increasing social justice and decreasing environmental impact in the entire supply chain. The respondents express how it needs to become integrated as a regular part of doing business in the fashion, apparel and textile industry. Alpen means that the shift is yet to be witnessed. He emphasizes how it seems as if everyone sees the potential, but how there yet is a lack of adoption. “We [H&M] have applied the Higg Index all the way out to our final suppliers, and I think we are the only company who have done so”, he says. He further clarifies how H&M have adopted the Higg Index 100% with all their first-tier suppliers, and 60% with all of their second-tier suppliers. Alpen
explains the integration as a key factor for H&M’s success of implementing the Higg Index. He refers to how the integration within a company must go further than the sustainability department and be integrated on all levels in the entire company. “It’s a really crucial point […] and I think this is why we are one of the few who have managed to implement the Higg Index in the extent that we have”, he says while emphasizing how more companies must start to apply the tool in their supply chains in a broader sense. “This has to happen if we want to make it a universal and standardized tool”, he concludes.

The continuous growth of this global initiative, and the high ambitions of its members, desiring to implement and drive solutions for global incorporation of sustainable development are rather contradicting to Elkington’s (1998) suggestion of sustainability not being prioritized in business. Considering the fact that SAC represents nearly half of the global production of apparel and footwear, it could be argued for how sustainable development today, in fact has become a priority within business. The ambition of further development and broader implementation of the Higg Index on a global scale seems as if it could be reached through development within transparency, as argued for by Chalmer et. al (2018). The authors highlight how brands’ and retailers’ willingness to disclose information about their supply chains can help drive transparency and contribute with additional stakeholder engagement on sustainable development in the fashion, apparel and textile industry. What also is being emphasized is how increased engagement further can spread among policymakers, and inspire crucial discussions with additional actors and industries, driving it further (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017).

### 4.6.2 The Consumer Facing Label & Full Company Transparency

A big part of this vision is expressed as getting the consumers on board through communicating the Higg Index to them, increasing their knowledge and awareness of the impact of production, allowing them to easier make informed decisions benefiting the environment.

“I think that maybe the consumer facing label is just talking about certain aspects initially, mainly focused on carbon and water. But I hope that over time, if you think of how consumers shop at the grocery store, they’re educated about food
much more than they used to be, and that eventually people will be educated about apparel and they’re able to make different choices.”

(Amy Roberts, Executive Director, OIA)

Brown explains how this is the vision of many and how SAC is constantly working with contributing to this through optimizing the ways of communicating the Higg Index to consumers. She gives an example of the European Commission’s work with the Product Environmental Footprint project, which is where it in the future potentially could be regulated to disclose the impacts of products. She explains how SAC has been involved with this project, and how several of their members have been doing pilot testing for ways on how to communicate this information to consumers on products in store, for example through an A through D or an E-scoring on the products (see Figure 8 below). Gerlach explains how SAC have placed much emphasis on monitoring how to communicate to consumers, and through which channel and at what level of debt. She explains how they are doing consumer research regarding the Higg Index, trying to narrow down what information and what type of message is relevant to consumers, trying to understand what information to communicate through hang tags on clothes in store and what to communicate through a web application. She accounts for it as a comprehensive research and a multi stakeholder effort involving packaging companies, designers of hang tags, and an it-company who builds web applications, emphasizing the efforts put into moving forward with communicating the Higg Index to end consumers and further reaching the 2020 goal of full company transparency.

![Figure 8 - Environmental Impact Score](Sustainable Apparel Coalition 2017) Attached in Appendix.

The key role of consumers, and their purchasing power is also brought up by Dickson, Eckman and Loker (2009), emphasizing how consumers can help drive sustainable
development further. Hence, the efforts being put into developing a consumer facing label enabling consumers to make easy and well-informed purchasing decisions seems highly important. Especially since multiple sources in literature highlight the current lack of supply chain and company transparency, and how this results in lack of knowledge with consumers (Dickson, Eckman & Loker 2009; Dickson 1999; Kozar & Hiller Connell 2016).

“Once the Higg Index is communicated to consumers; It’s going to be a clear differentiation between those that do their rights, and those that don’t, and it’s going to be embarrassing… or hopefully it is motivating”

(Kevin Myette, Director, Bluesign Technologies)

Several respondents account for how the 2020 goal of full company transparency will motivate and further assist this development. Both Carbonaro and Ridgeway underline the importance of this step and how it could affect the entire industry. It is being communicated how some highly relevant SAC member companies already have decided to go public with their Higg Index company score in 2020. Carbonaro emphasizes how companies who are not courageous enough to declare full transparency will be forced to explain why that is, putting additional pressure on them to improve, and wanting to do so. Louies emphasizes how many are concerned about the possibility of sharing all that kind of information with your brands. “They want it to work, but they are not yet convinced”, she says emphasizing the understanding for the advantages while describing the transformation as difficult. She further explains how all has not gone smoothly, explaining that the Facility and Environmental Module 3.0 was an important decision for C&A to engage in but how it has failed to meet several deadlines which is aggravating the ability to convince the ‘non-believers’ of SAC, as Louies refers to them. “Either SAC will succeed in going public or it will most probably become redundant and useless”, Carbonaro says highlighting the crucialness of this next step for SAC concerning the 2020 goal of full company transparency.

Similarly, to what both Carbonaro and Myette express about companies who will not provide full transparency, Gereffi and Frederick (2010) concludes how these brands and companies will lose their ability to compete with others who do. Especially since the demands concerning transparency are increasing from several different directions including policymakers, NGOs, and consumers. However, what might be an even bigger concern is SAC’s collective ability to fulfil their commitment of full company transparency by 2020. Taking the Ellen MacArthur
Foundation’s (2017) suggestion into account, collective commitments are what brings momentum and helps achievement of change.

4.6.3 The Next Chapter (of not losing momentum)

All respondents underline the need for an outcome of change concerning the way fashion, apparel, textile and footwear is being made. The ambition is that the Higg Index continuously will keep reducing the overall environmental impact from textile and apparel production. Carbonaro clarifies how there must be a systemic change, moving from a “no necessary harmful approach” to a positive, regenerative approach. “It will imply a consumer behavioral change; people need to buy less, but buy better”, she says while indicating how we must decelerate the speed of the mass market and large scale based industrial model that is based on mass- and over consumption to construct a sustainable model. Several respondents express similar opinions, emphasizing a deceleration of today’s industry speed as an important part of fulfilling this ambition. Despite of expressed concerns, the tone is hopeful among the respondents, who keep referring to how their industry previously has shown strong leadership in promoting and using recycled and organic materials. “I think our industry will continue to show leadership in adopting the Higg Index”, Roberts says referring specifically to the outdoor industry and how retailers have influenced vendors and brands to complete the Higg Index. “I think this has been one of the most single important efforts”, she says while highlighting the impact retailers can have over brands.

The respondents’ discussion of the need for systemic change and new industrial models allowing for this change to happen, could find support in literature by suggestions such as the closed loop concept (McDonough & Braungart 1998), and circular economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). The closed loop concept further contributing with desires of the respondents such as the extension of a product’s life cycle through developed recycling systems and regulations of waste (McDonough & Braungart 1998). Similarly, the circular textiles economy, as suggested by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017) have identified four ambitions (illustrated in the Figure 5, in chapter 3.3) with independent actions leading to a replacement of the current linear system. These include phasing out microfiber release, increased use of clothing, improve recycling, and effective use of resources while moving towards renewable inputs (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017). Ambition number two and
three further interconnects with Carbonaro’s suggestion of a change in consumer and purchasing behavior. Further Sweeny (2015) confirms Roberts statement of how the fashion industry has and will continue to show leadership in use of organic materials. Yet Perry (2013) emphasizes the complexity of desired reduction of consumption in a consumption focused industry such as fashion. However, it should be highlighted how the speed of consumption does not represent fashion, but rather the results of business models developed within the industry. Thankfully, these can be replaced. However, the global collaboration might need to sharpen their focus on results enabling for these changes to come through, as losing momentum might jeopardize their global power of impact and all their hard work.

SAC is being criticized in the aspect of not moving forward quickly enough. “SAC need to look at how we can speed up this process. It’s important to keep a good balance on leading performance while keeping consensus”, Alpen says emphasizing how there is too much consensus focus in SAC. Gerlach however emphasizes how there will always be certain topics which goes somewhat smoother, and then there will be others with a bit more challenges to overcome depending on topic and invested interests. Ekberg partly agrees yet explaining how “SAC must show that they are a legitimate organization, and that they can show results”. Myette agrees, stating how there now is a ticking clock where governments are considering their own jurisdiction, where in Myette’s opinion, all suggestions are not well founded or considered. He explains how SAC is very involved in the governments of the membership countries, to assure that there is an involvement and understanding for SAC and its vision. However, he fears that if SAC cannot demonstrate results soon enough, there is a risk of governments making up their own alternative to the Higg Index, which would make all the work that has been done with the Higg Index, and the tools, irrelevant. “The reason why the effort was started would be a failure if you had 20 different governments with different requirements”, Myette says. Altogether, the biggest concern, explicitly expressed by all respondents is how SAC and the Higg Index could risk losing momentum if they do not speed up their process and start to show results of scaled reduced impact.

“You’re never finished but today we have the last mile in front of us before the first peak we want to reach, which is going public in 2020. I am confident that this last mile, these last two years will give us the energy to accelerate our path and move quickly to the top”.

(Simonetta Carbonaro, Consumer Psychologist, Swedish School of Textiles)
5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the main findings and contribution of thesis will be presented followed by limitations of the study. The aim of this chapter is to respond to the purpose and illustrate how the findings helped reached the aim of the thesis. Further, suggestions will be given for future research.

5.1 Purpose and Contribution of Study

Previous research within the field of sustainability in the fashion industry has to a large extent been focused on the consumer perspective and the increased awareness of sustainability. More recent scholars have examined the effects this has had on the fashion, apparel and textile supply chains. Yet the majority of these have been focused on the social pillar of sustainability, excluding the environmental and economic aspect (Elkington 1998). Only a few published scholars have been incorporating parts or certain aspects of SAC and the Higg Index. This motivated the need for an updated study examining SAC and the Higg Index in its contemporary situation, while including all pillars of sustainable development. This research has contributed with new insights and knowledge, valuable both for stakeholders of the coalition, and of the fashion, apparel and textile industry. Further this study has identified the voices and opinions of the coalition members in a sense which has not been done before. Rather than testing existing theories, the aim of this research has been to fill the knowledge gap about the development of the organization, creating a deeper understanding and knowledge about SAC and the Higg Index. Therefore, the main purpose of this study has been formulated as such:

The purpose of this research is to identify key decision points and actions in the development of SAC and the Higg Index. The aim is to understand how to create a foundation for sustainable development within the fashion, apparel and textile industry on a global scale.

The main findings helped identify these key decision points and actions in the development of SAC and the Higg Index. Further a few conclusions can be drawn from these, assisting in the understanding of how to create a foundation for sustainable development as described above. The key decision points and actions that have been identified are the following;
Getting the Right People on the Bus, then Teaching Them How to Drive It

Industry Collaboration through Democratic Organizational Culture

Striving for Global Sustainable Development = Good for Business

Trustworthy Standards, Communication & Transparency throughout the Supply Chain

Getting the right people on the bus is emphasized as one of the key actions in the development process. The respondents agree on how the initial idea for the need of a standardized measurement tool within the fashion, apparel and textile industry was born prior to SAC’s existence. They emphasize how a few various key players explored the idea separately, putting in a lot of time, energy and sweat equity into creating a framework and structure, turning the idea into something real and applicable to the industry. Then they made the key decision to share their ideas with each other and unite within SAC as they realized their ideas could go further if they were collaborating. The conclusion of this being how although SAC partly is built on the back of OIA, with the help of the Nike MSI tool, and from the driving force of Patagonia and Walmart collaborating, the union of these right people is what led to the creation of the organization. Further this odd counterintuitive collaboration inspired others to join and allowed for it to grow. The individual contribution and dedication from each of these right people is what resulted in SAC and the Higg Index, or symbolically speaking, how they thought themselves to drive the bus. This further relates with the key action of industry collaboration and the key decision of this collaboration to obtain a democratic organizational culture and in support of an equal partnership in between all stakeholders and members. The respondents highlight the need for a multi stakeholder collaboration that corresponds to the global systemic challenge they aim to tackle with SAC, collaborating to reach reduced impact. They further express how it is impossible for anyone to do it alone as it demands various expertise in various areas, and how if aiming for one united way to operate, democratic collaboration is inevitable, although sometimes challenging. The conclusion being how democratic industry collaboration is facilitating the work in a global multi stakeholder initiative as it provides with multiple resources of competence. Besides being efficient in terms of resources it helps bridge relations and establish trust in between stakeholders, and throughout the supply chain. If remaining a democratic and equal partnership, all stakeholders will eventually develop a feeling of ownership over the work that they contribute with. This further strengthens both the individual and collective engagement and is the best presumption for success within a multi stakeholder collaboration.
The respondents agree around how striving for global sustainable development has a positive impact on business. They highlight how increased pressure and demands are coming from several different stakeholders, emphasizing the purchase power of consumers but also the powerful impact of governments, brands, retailers and investors as key actions in the development of the Higg Index. They refer to the Higg Index as an investment, explaining how it reduces both financial and human resources while having a positive impact on environmental reduction and social exploitation in the supply chain. The key decision for collectively aiming to turn sustainability into something profitable is due to business’ key role in the investment for global sustainability efforts and sustainable development. Therefore, another key action in the development is to align business and policy makers as striving to drive sustainable development on a maximum global scale. The conclusion being how striving for global sustainable development within business is increasing the global sustainability commitment while increasing brand value and lowering risks in the supply chain, benefitting all three pillars of sustainable development. Regarding the fourth and final key factor of trustworthy standards, transparency and communication throughout the supply chain, all respondents emphasize this as one of the strongest key decisions within the development of the Higg Index. One reason for this being is the excessive number of various standards, guidelines and codes of conducts, confusing both consumers and supply chain partners within the industry. The respondents unite around the conclusion of how only through standardized tools measuring sustainability in all levels of the supply chain in a comparable and scalable way, sustainability improvements will be made possible. They further express full company transparency and supply chain traceability as key actions for future success of the development of SAC and the Higg Index. In fact, they highlight SAC’s goal of full company transparency by 2020 where brands will disclose and communicate their Higg Index Scores to their end consumers. The conclusion being how if aiming to achieve sustainability improvements within the fashion, apparel and textile supply chains, uniformed ways of measuring sustainability in a scalable way must become fully implemented and perceived as a regular part of doing business. Further, brands and retailers must be willing to disclose these scores accepting how they might not be perfect only because they are transparent and communicated to consumers. This is precisely why they should be transparent, as this will encourage and drive motivation for improvements among all stakeholders. This is what could help turn ‘the race to the bottom’ into ‘the race to the top’ and provide SAC with momentum.
5.2 Limitations

The research is taking a management perspective and has analyzed how the establishment of SAC and the Higg Index has developed over time according to stakeholders involved early in the process. The perspective is thereby limited to insights and interpretations by former or current members, and developers of SAC, and of the Higg Index. The study has focused on identifying key decision points and actions in the development of the organization and the measurement tools and has due to the broader focus excluded detailed information accounting for each specific working group within the different tools in the Higg Index. Rather, it has aimed to present a general overview of the development process. Further the study is of exploratory character why conclusions have been drawn with caution and rather has aimed to focus on the contribution of new insights, a deeper understanding and increased knowledge of a rather unexplored phenomenon, the development of SAC and the Higg Index.

5.3 Suggestions for Future Research

The main suggestion for future research, is to conduct a study which includes the perspective of the manufacturers and workers in the fashion, apparel and textile supply chains. An ambition which could not be fulfilled with this thesis, due to limited resources of time and contacts. Including their perspective could provide with a more profound and fair description of the organizational culture in SAC, as they constitute a great part of the organization and the ability to implement the Higg Index in a successful way. Further their knowledge and insights could assist with identification of potential obstacles and solutions for such regarding the ability to globally adopt the Higg Index within all levels of the supply chain. This type of research could provide with valuable results for the coalition stakeholders as well as aspirational members within the fashion, apparel and textiles industry. Further it could be interesting to gain deeper knowledge and understanding about how the task teams of SAC is being put together and how they operate. This study identified opinions expressing how the unequal representation of SMEs within these groups sometimes can arrive as problematic and contradictory to SAC’s ambition of an equal partnership. A study examining this area of problem further might assist with valuable solutions useful for the coalition members as well as additional multi stakeholder collaborations operating similarly.
6 LIST OF REFERENCES


- 97 -


Sustainable Apparel Coalition (2017). SACHigg Complete Overview_05302017.pptx [internal material]. Sustainable Apparel Coalition.


7 APPENDIX

FIGURE 1: The Coalition Stakeholders
FIGURE 2: The Higg Index
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Name:
Years of industry experience:
Years of SAC experience:
Work Title:
Company:

Describe your/your company’s role in relation to the SAC and the development of the Higg Index.

1. How was the initiative received among those who first were approached to join the SAC/and within your company?

2. What processes/decision points have been crucial when establishing and developing the SAC?

3. How has this collaboration evolved over time (shifted, changed, developed)/and how do you perceive the collaboration with other member companies and competitors?

4. How did the process look like when determining what tools to include within the Higg Index/implement within your company?

5. Why is this type of organization and its suite of standardized tools necessary? (What sustainable impact will it have on the industry?)

6. What are the advantages and disadvantages with developing a standardized measurement tool such as the Higg Index?
7. **How did the development of the Higg Index look like in terms of coordination/collaboration between members? (What decisions were easy/difficult, and what actions were necessary to make this collaboration work?)**

8. **How has the global growth of the organization come to affect the collaboration within it as well as the development of the Higg Index? (Has the growth of the SAC been positive/complex/resulted in difficulties/change of engagement level?)**

9. **What actions/decisions and forward thinking are crucial to make this large and global organization work and further develop within a global network?**

10. **What do you consider to be the greatest challenges for the development of the Higg Index, and for utilizers of the tool?**

11. **Do you consider a shift in mindset regarding how to work with sustainability within the textile industry/and within your company, if so, describe it and how it has been reflected within the SAC?**

   **Describe your vision for the SAC, and the Higg Index, along with your thoughts on how this will affect the textile industry.**

   **Recommendations for interviews:**
FIGURE 3: Interview Participants
## FIGURE 4: Presentation of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>DATE OF INTERVIEW</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>YEARS OF INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>YEARS OF SAC EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>WORK TITLE</th>
<th>CURRENT WORKPLACE</th>
<th>RELATION TO THE SAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2018-02-09</td>
<td>Kevin Eldred</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>Global Sustainability Expert &amp; Managing Director</td>
<td>Leadership &amp; Sustainability</td>
<td>Former Chair of the Board of Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2018-02-12</td>
<td>Keris Myette</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>Director Global Brand Services</td>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Involved in the creation of the GQA &amp; the EoE Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2018-02-27</td>
<td>Samantha Carbone</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>Consumer Psychologist &amp; Strategic Consultant</td>
<td>The Swedish School of Textiles</td>
<td>Board Member &amp; Former Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2018-03-12</td>
<td>Catherine Lewis</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Project Manager Global Sustainability</td>
<td>C&amp;A</td>
<td>Project Manager and Transparency Team Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2018-03-13</td>
<td>Rick Ridgeway</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>VP Public Affairs</td>
<td>Patagonia</td>
<td>Initiator and Co-Founder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2018-03-29</td>
<td>Beth Jones</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>National Director of Sustainable Business Innovation</td>
<td>OIA</td>
<td>Involved in the start up meetings, engagements and working groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2018-03-30</td>
<td>Amy Roberts</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>OIA</td>
<td>Involved in the development of the EoE Index &amp; SAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2018-04-05</td>
<td>Julie M. Hooven</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Director of The Higg Index</td>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>Involved in the work with the Higg Index Product Tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2018-04-12</td>
<td>Sara Oelich</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Since foundations</td>
<td>Senior Project Manager Sustainability Team</td>
<td>C&amp;A</td>
<td>Involved in C&amp;A’s initial engagement with the SAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2018-04-20</td>
<td>Hendrik Alpen</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Sustainability Engagement Manager</td>
<td>H&amp;M</td>
<td>Overseeing H&amp;M’s engagement with the SAC &amp; the internal alignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 5: Ambitions for a new textiles economy

Figure 5: Ambitions for a New Textiles Economy (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017, p.23).
FIGURE 6: Themes Identified via Interviews
FIGURE 7: Identified Themes via Interviews 2.0

- Collaborative & Democratic Organizational Culture
- Open for Industry Collaboration
- Strong Engagement & Long-term Commitment
- Communication by Standardization
- Demand for Transparency & Trust throughout the Supply Chain
- Striving for Improvement, Globally & Individually
- Perceiving Sustainability as Business Value

Key Factors for the Development of the Higg Index & the SAC

- Industry Collaboration through Democratic Organizational Culture
- “Getting the Right People on the Bus, then Teaching Them How to Drive it”
- Trustworthy Standards, Communication & Transparency Throughout the Supply Chain
- Striving for Global Sustainable Development = Good for Business
FIGURE 8: Environmental Impact Score

(Sustainable Apparel Coalition 2017)