

Final Report:

Student Research Stay at the University of British Columbia

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Research topic: **“The transformational potential of circular grassroots initiatives on sustainable consumption patterns from Vancouver and Berlin.**

The case of the textiles and fashion system.”

Summer term (May – July 2019) / 3 month

With Canada's ambitious zero waste plans and circular economy strategies formulated by the national zero waste council, Vancouver offered a very promising ground for research on my Master's Thesis. In the Thesis, I aimed to look at the role and potential of grassroots initiatives, with special attention given to circular initiatives in a transition of a fashion and textiles system. My research goal was to look at theories and to draft the empirical design consisting of case studies from Berlin and Vancouver. While these goals were accomplished, my overall experience and learning exceeded my expectations. For the literature review, the University of British Columbia offered an exceptional surrounding with numerous state of the art libraries and book access. During my desk research, my main supervisor Prof. Dr. Kurt Hübner, from the Institute for European Studies, had very useful input. In revise talks on my topic and research progress, he had valuable advice on the research design and framing of the research question. With his background and expertise in Political Science and Economy, he opened the angle of analysis by introducing the concept of “policy entrepreneurship”, which I am integrating into my Thesis as a conceptual framework. Another professor, who I met for a very inspiring research chat was the Associate Professor and Associate Head of Sociology, Prof. Corrigall-Brown. She was a great sparring partner on my research design. Being an expert in social movements & political sociology, she also had specific advice on the role of grassroots Innovation – both in terms of literature as well as proposing examples and cases to look at and connect to.

While during the summer terms, not many students and faculty staff are on campus, there was always open ears and advice whenever needed. Furthermore, during the summer term, many visiting international research students are conducting work at UBC and the Go Global Team of the

university is doing a great job, to facilitate a connection and exchange within this group. While not sole sustainability-focused, I met and befriended fellow research students and it was interesting to see how sustainability issues are addressed in other context, disciplines, and cultures. A very nice coincidence was that the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences took place at UBC beginning of June. The congress brings together thousands of academics, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners. The campus became a vibrant event space for a few days and I was able to audit and participate in some of the sessions and had some interesting chats with fellow participants and speakers.

Not only on a personal and scientific level was the research stay a great value, but also did it open the opportunity to engage in a wider international circular economy network. To gather empirical data, by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews on the role and potential of grassroots initiatives I met up with such circular initiatives in Vancouver. This part of the research was the most rewarding experience of my research stay. I was lucky enough to get in contact with, Irina McKenzie, the founder of FABCYCLE, a circular B2B business, which aims to enable designers to disrupt the cycle of garment production and transform waste into resources. Being a social entrepreneur and an avid advocate of the Circular Economy in Vancouver, we had several long chats on the topic. It was also through her contacts and the lively network, that I was able to gather further interview partners, not only in Vancouver but also from Toronto where I had interview calls. Connecting my theoretical insights, with the real-life situation and insights from circular initiatives was very rewarding. I learned about persistent challenges, which the initiatives face in terms of market lock-ins and policy hurdles. On the other hand, they form novel networks and front-run and advocate sustainability solutions and make aware of system failure and sustainable solutions. These insights are being incorporated into my Master Thesis for which I am currently conducting more interviews with initiatives from Berlin. Upon the research stay, I am even more motivated to pursue my studies and upon completing my Master's career in the field of circular and sustainable transitions.