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*Published in:*  
Sustainable Luxury : An international perspective

*DOI:*  
[10.1007/978-3-031-06928-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06928-4)

Published: 17/08/2022

*Document Version*  
Peer-reviewed accepted author manuscript, also known as Final accepted manuscript or Post-print

*Please cite the original version:*  
Niinimäki, K. (2022). Sustainable eco-luxury in the Scandinavian context. In C. E. Henninger, & N. K. Athwal (Eds.), *Sustainable Luxury : An international perspective* (pp. 35-57). (Palgrave Advances in Luxury). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06928-4>

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## **Part 2: Sustainability Luxury Consumption**

### Chapter 9

#### **Sustainable eco-luxury in the Scandinavian context**

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#### **Abstract**

This chapter approaches the concept of sustainable luxury through a consumer survey and a company case in Finland and aims to determine the Scandinavian perspectives of eco-luxury. Scandinavian consumers have a strong environmental awareness, making it interesting to investigate the understanding of luxury in this narrow frame. The company case is an iconic Scandinavian brand that heavily invests in sustainable alternatives in their industrial practices. The findings show that consumers define three different levels of luxury; an elite lifestyle, products or services that are one grade better (rewarding yourself), and everyday luxury (in connection to own wellbeing).

Key words: Sustainable luxury, Eco-luxury, Scandinavian, Slow design, Natural dyes

#### **9.1 Introduction**

The Scandinavian lifestyle is well known for its environmental value base and its appreciation of pure nature and slow living (Ollila, 1998). This environmental value base lays the foundations for Scandinavian consumers' understanding of luxury. The hypothesis in this study is that luxury in the Scandinavian context is connected to sustainable values, eco-appreciation, natural-based alternatives, and good 'everyday' design. Scandinavians see eco-luxury as something not meant for wealthy people and elite consumers alone, but as a good, functional design that is based on ecological values. This hypothesis was tested by collecting consumer-centred data through a questionnaire and analysing and reflecting these findings against a real business case. Even though these data and the case were from Finland, they can be interpreted as representing the Scandinavian worldview, i.e., the lifestyles and societal value bases in Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland.

The business case is a well-known design house and Scandinavian lifestyle brand, which tests plant-based natural dyes in their industrial textile printing processes and their garment collections. Natural dyes are not currently largely used in industrial textile colouring processes and are substituted by chemical dyes. Chemical dyes originate from petroleum production and many of them are very harmful and toxic and have environmental impacts. An interest in finding alternatives for synthetic chemicals and colours used in industry is emerging, and natural dyes are gaining attention (e.g., BioColour, 2019).

The research approach presented in this chapter discusses sustainable eco-luxury in a Scandinavian context through the viewpoints of industry, consumers, and the environment.

## 9.2. Literature review

### 9.2.1. Scandinavian lifestyle

In Scandinavian countries, nature is highly appreciated and understood to be part of the Scandinavian lifestyle and worldview. In Finland, every man's right (*the right to common access, or the right to roam*) provides access to forest areas owned by the state or even by private individuals. This right is significant for Finns and is considered one of the *basic rights* in Finland (Oittinen & Vuolle, 1994). Finns enjoy the right to freely visit forests and to hike, camp, fish, or pick berries in nature. This creates a special relationship with nature and makes recreation possible in natural environments (*ibid.*). A 2021 study shows that 37% of Finns go out into nature several times a week, 12% every day and 16% once a month or less (Koistinen et al., 2021). Many also traditionally own a family summer cottage and spend their leisure time close to lakes or the seashore, which makes it easy for them to spend time in nature. This tradition also creates a solid foundation for relationships with nature based on positive childhood experiences at summer cottage (Salmi et al., 2006). The roots of many Finns or their parents are still in the countryside (Granberg, 1999), and 'summer cottages provide a way to maintain a connection with the countryside and the peasant way of life' (Salmi et al., 2006, 276). A little over half of the Finnish population spend their summer holidays and weekends in summer cottages close to nature (Sievänen & Pouta, 2002). It is estimated that the number of leisure residences in Finland is probably the largest in the world relative to population size (Jokinen 2002).

This special relationship with nature also shows in Finns' mindset. The Finnish population takes environmental protection and climate change seriously. A survey by Eurobarometer in 2013 showed that 84% of the Finnish population considered climate change a serious problem; 57% stated that they had personally taken actions to lower their impact on the environment. The study by Koistinen et al. (2021) supports these earlier findings. The aim of the study was to survey Finns' relationship with nature: 82% of its respondents agreed with the statement that the value of nature cannot be measured in monetary terms, 78% believed that economic and personal wellbeing is dependent on nature, and 71% considered protecting the diversity of nature to be society's most important task. The highest motivators for actions to protect nature were safeguarding future generations' lives (52%), protecting other species and diversity (48%), the desire to act and live according to planetary boundaries (44%), and human beings' dependence on nature (43%). Only 28% of the respondents mentioned their own experiences of the deterioration of nature's conditions as motivation to protect nature (Koistinen et al., 2021).

The same study (Koistinen et al., 2021) revealed Finns' mentality of nature appreciation; most of the participants highlighted how spending time in nature offers intangible wellbeing: how they become calmer, relax, recover from stress, and their mental wellbeing improves. The most important things that Finns felt nature gives them were peace of mind (65%); recreation and energy (62%); mental wellbeing (59%); recovery (56%); access to berries, mushrooms, and fish (56%); and health and physical wellbeing (55%).

Our worldview has a connection to our mentality, which is defined as the unconscious side of worldview (Hyrkkänen, 2002, p.110). Worldview can also be seen to include notions of human nature, conceptions of the ego, images of society and social stratification, notions of work, perceptions of time and space, and images of a 'good life' (Löfgren, 1981, pp.26- 27). It is connected

to our lifestyles, values and the ways in which we consume. Cultural context and its general worldview define not only the consumption habits of a certain geographical location but also the values behind consumption that lead to certain ways of consuming in general. We also know that environment-related actions such as reducing consumption are affected by a person's own values as well as society's values (Barr, 2003). Lifestyle, as a person's social practices and the story they tell about them, forms the foundations for individuals' consumption choices and the dilemma that they constantly face when making these choices on the basis of their individual needs/desires and social benefits (Niinimäki 2011, Jackson 2008). A consumer's sense of self-identify and the understanding of what kind of consumer they are influences their consumption habits (Peattie, 2010). Moral considerations arise when a consumer considers ethical choices and acts in a morally correct way (making the right consumption decision); they approach the ideal ethical world (Oksanen, 2002).

The special relationship with nature can also be seen in consumers' value bases and their consumption habits. So, what kind of consumers are Finns? Finnish consumers are ready to take action to safeguard nature (Koistinen et al, 2021). A clear majority, 62%, was ready to change their lifestyle or consumption habits to stop diversity loss, and 62% were also ready to do the same to stop climate change (Koistinen et al, 2021).

Finnish consumers seem to be slightly less affected by social pressure in their consumption; they are quite individual and base their consumption habits firmly on their own values instead of on social acceptance. In Koistinen's research, only 24% of respondents stated that they felt pressured to be 'a certain type' or 'to look a certain way', 27% claimed to be inspired by other peoples' styles or lifestyles, and 31% admitted being influenced by social media, blogs or magazines (Koistinen et al., 2021). In the same study, the participants pointed out that they only bought things out of real need (64%), but some felt that the need for 'small pleasures' in everyday life might easily lead to impulse buying (60%) (ibid.).

In terms of the products we purchase, especially in the case of textile and fashion items, we need to study ethical consumption. In one study conducted in Finland (Niinimäki, 2011, p.131), 63% of consumers stated that they were always interested in ethical issues when they were purchasing in general and 28% stated that they often considered ethical issues while purchasing products. When asked about their ethical interest in textiles and garments and how often they considered sustainability when choosing to purchase these products, 17% of consumers responded always and 49% often. These figures show Finns' high interest in ethical and sustainable consumption, and this can be connected to concerns about climate change and the environmental worldview.

### **9.2.2. New understanding of luxury**

The traditional understanding of luxury has been that it can be attained by only a few very rich people: elite consumption (Berry, 1994; Appardurai, 1988). However, luxury can be divided into four different categories: utilitarian products and services, indulgence products and services, lifestyle products, and dream luxury (Danziger, 2004). The dream luxury category in particular is connected to very expensive status products through which consumers seek differentiation. Lately we have seen some sort of change in this understanding of luxury. Luxury products have become more common (production has increased) or are largely copied so that brands can also be attained by others and not just the elite few and very rich people (Nyrhinen & Wilska, 2012). Producing and even copying luxury brand products has become so common that they are no longer a luxury, and are more like premium-quality products. Furthermore, rapid technological development and the move towards virtual reality while simultaneously losing touch with nature have increased consumers' needs for authenticity (ibid.). This development is also connected to the emergence of the

experience economy, in which people consume more experiences than material products (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The post-materialistic consumption approach in developed countries (Global North) addresses minimalist consumption, and this can also be seen in the understanding of luxury. Martinez-Alier (1995) connects the new, more responsible understanding of luxury to this new era of post industrialism and post materialism.

Nyrhinen and Wilska (2012) have studied the change in the understanding of luxury among Finnish consumers. In addition to luxury as a status orientation, a new definition has been emerging: it includes authenticity, experiences, and ethical and ecological considerations. These findings clearly show that Finnish consumers respect more ethical and ecological aspects of luxury than the status aspect. Even though luxury is still linked to a hedonistic value base of consumption, the results from Finland can be understood as part of a greater international development in which consumers' interests are shifting to a greater extent than before from materialist product-owning and status-showing to more abstract luxury understanding and an immaterial approach to luxury, which places more importance on company responsibility. (ibid.)

A study conducted in Finland shows that even general consumption trends are changing from materialistic interest towards a more unmaterialistic way of consuming (Statistic central, cited by Niskakangas, 12.8.2019). In the mid-1990s, Finnish consumers spent as much money on services as they did on products, but since then the money spent on services has increased steadily. For example, in early 2019 during the first quartal, money spend to services was 26% more than money spent on products (ibid.). The consumption trend has been to simplify home interiors (minimalism and the KonMari movement) and decrease the number of products one owns and instead to invest in one's own wellbeing, experiences, and services. This also seems to differ between generations; the older generation respects the material side of consumption (e.g., products with sentimental value) while the younger generation wants to own as few objects as possible, and instead of buying new products, to invest in experiences. The notion is that one can increase their happiness with services and even achieve longer-lasting satisfaction than from buying new products (ibid.).

### **9.3. Survey on consumers' understanding of luxury**

A consumer survey was conducted in spring 2019 (March–April) in Finland on consumers' understanding of luxury in general and its connection to the textile and garment field, food sector, travel, and service experiences. The survey link was distributed on social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, some discussion groups), and was based on the snowball sampling approach. The survey reached 94 respondents, of whom ten were male and 84 were female consumers. Seventy-four respondents informed us that they lived in a city and 20 informed us that they lived in the countryside.

The questionnaire had both statement types of questions (based on a seven-point Likert scale) on the different aspects of luxury, structured multi choice questions and open questions, which the respondent could answer in their own words. For example, 'What does luxury mean to you? Is it material, experiences, emotions, own time, all of these, or something else? Please describe it in your own words'.

The mixed method approach was applied to develop a more comprehensive and descriptive understanding of the phenomena under study (Platton, 1999). The analysis was conducted in three phases. In the first round, the answers that were countable were listed according to their numerical value (e.g., background information) to build a picture of the respondents' age groups and income

levels as well as their general understanding of luxury. Table 1 and 2 show the respondents' age groups and income levels. Table 3 shows the consumers' eagerness to seek luxury experiences from food, fashion, services, and travel, as well as the frequency of such purchases. Table 4 shows the respondents' emerging positive feelings towards garments' different fibre and colour types. To further survey consumers' luxury experiences, multiple choice questions were used, which offered a more detailed picture of all the elements that luxury experiences could offer in the context of garments. Table 5 illustrates these results.

The second stage examined the open answers using the content analysis approach as the guiding principle to find common themes related to luxury and the answers to the research question on how Finnish consumers understand and define luxury. The analysis included several rounds to account for rigour and to form a solid understanding of the key themes of this topic (Flick, 2004). These findings are expanded and described in more detailed in the 'Three categories of luxury' section. Table 6 summarises the findings of this analysis. The third stage involved the interpretation of the direction of the luxury experience, i.e., the direction that the respondents mentioned when describing what luxury means to them. They claimed that some aspects of luxury pointed towards looking for social acceptance (outwards), rewarding yourself (inwards) and even towards personal wellbeing (inwards). These directions are shown in Table 6. To deepen the description of this phenomena in this special context, the Marimekko case was used as an example of the value base in Scandinavian eco-luxury.

Table 1. Respondents' age

Respondents' age n=						
Below 20 years	21–30	31–40	41–50	51–60	61–70	Above 70
4	8	10	23	25	22	4

Table 2. Respondents' income levels

Respondents' income level n=				
Low income	Lower middle class	Middle class	Upper middle class	Upper class
25	17	22	17	13

#### 9.4. Results

The main finding in these answers was that Finnish consumers define three categories of luxury; 1) an elite lifestyle (only a few people able to attain it), 2) products or services that are one grade better (requires some effort to attain it), 3) everyday luxury (i.e. services that cheer you up) (see Table 6). These survey results will be discussed in more detail in Section 9.4.4, but first we present the sources of luxury that people search for, the eco-aspects of luxury, and luxury experiences of garments.

### 9.4.1. Sources of luxury

When asked about the sources from which Finnish consumers searched for their experiences of luxury, they answered fashion, services and travels as the areas to which they turned a few times a year. Food was a field they searched for the luxury experience once a month, but some consumers used food as a luxury experience even weekly (See Table 3).

Table 3. Sources of luxury and frequency of searching for it

	Cannot say n=	Never n=	Seldom than once a year n=	A few times a year n=	Once a month n=	Weekly n=
<b>Food</b>	1	4	11	22	34	22
<b>Fashion</b>	1	11	19	40	11	11
<b>Services</b>	3	7	18	36	26	4
<b>Travel</b>	3	8	23	41	6	3

### 9.4.2. Eco-aspects of luxury

As one aim of the study was to identify consumer's attitudes towards natural colours and natural fibres, it asked: What kind of image arises in your mind when you think of these aspects (positive or negative image).

Table 4 shows that in consumers' minds, the image of natural textile colours and natural fibres in textiles and garments had a strong connection not only to sustainability but also to the image of luxury. The connection to synthetic colours or synthetic fibres in textiles and garments was not so strong.

Table 4. Positive image of colour and fibre sources (natural or synthetic)

Positive image in connection to	Natural textile colours n=	Synthetic textile colours n=	Natural fibres n=	Synthetic fibres n=
Environmental responsibility and sustainability	72	4	72	4
Recyclability	58	4	78	17
Luxury	64	6	63	1

### 9.4.3. Experience of luxury in garments

The questionnaire also asked respondents' opinions on what kinds of elements in clothing affect their experience of luxury. High quality and durability received the highest number of responses but wear experience was also highly appreciated. Several answers connected to sustainability and responsibility also mentioned transparency in the supply chain, location of manufacture, environmental impact, and natural materials (See Table 5). It can be interpreted that consumers connect luxury not only with better quality, but also with deeper environmental consideration and

greater responsibility more than do other product types. This is an interesting finding, as these aspects are less obvious in the current global fashion business in which manufacturing factories are often on the other side of the globe, transparency is hard to achieve (supply chains are long), and the control of sustainability issues or environmental impacts is very difficult.

On the other hand, well-known brands or famous designers received a low number of responses, which can be interpreted as the status aspect of luxury not being very important for these consumers.

Table 5. What elements affect consumers' experience of luxury (in clothing)?

<b>Garment and luxury</b>	<b>Total n=94</b>
A garment being of high quality and long lasting.	n=88
A garment feeling comfortable when worn.	n=77
Knowing that the garment's manufacture has required a great deal of hand craft work.	n=74
The company behind the garment transparently revealing their supply chain and manufacturing process.	n=73
Feeling that the garment is made for me.	n=72
The garment being easy to maintain (e.g., water laundering).	n=72
The garment being made locally (e.g., in Scandinavian countries).	n=66
The garment being made in Finland.	n=64
The garment's manufacture having a low environmental impact.	n=64
The garment being made from natural materials.	n=64
The company behind the garment being responsible (social responsibility, environmental responsibility).	n=64
The garment being coloured using natural colours.	n=61
The garment being from a famous brand.	n=32
The garment being designed by a famous designer.	n=26

#### 9.4.4. Three categories of luxury

Analysis of the open responses to what luxury means for consumers revealed three categories: elite lifestyle, one grade better, and everyday luxury (See Table 6).

##### Elite lifestyle

This lifestyle category represents the traditional way of understanding luxury. Comments such as luxury is 'something of which only a few pieces exist but are of especially good, premium quality' and 'products that are made especially expensive and are not essential in everyday life' point out the aspect of being unnecessary, rare and only for a few people. This category was also linked to a strong materialistic way of consuming.

From the product design point of view, consumers highlighted attributes such as a high level of aesthetics and quality, a well-known brand or designer, haute couture in fashion, and top-quality materials. Durable products were also mentioned, as well as expectations that luxury products are made with more consideration of ethical aspects in production and more transparency in the supply chain. The interpretations of this is that Finnish consumers expect more responsibility and sustainability from luxury products and that this is morally and ethically the correct way in which to act. Moreover, knowledge of the background of the product, transparency in general and



environmental impacts, in other words not only responsibility but also transparency and more information, were connected to luxury products.

‘A material luxury is when I know exactly what it is (origin, production process, environmental impacts), how I should take care of it and how it lasts – it has to be long lasting. Nothing disposable represents luxury to me.’

Furthermore, the aspect of differentiating these brand products were mentioned.

‘When I buy some luxury garment, I expect no one in my neighbourhood to have the same garment’

Consumers build their identity in a social context (Kaiser, 1990) and this elite lifestyle category can be seen to link the aspect of trying to reach social acceptance through identity-building with external symbols such as brand garments. McCracken (1988) pointed out that products can be seen to represent a certain lifestyle that consumers are trying to reach. Brand products can be understood as building a bridge towards the desired lifestyle and the existing reality. Consumers purchase brand garments to obtain a small part of the desired lifestyle to which they aspire (ibid.). This could be connected to the dream aspect, when a luxury product is something we dream of owning, but we also dream of having all the values (status) that are connected to this brand and the lifestyle it represents.

### **One grade better**

The second category that could be identified from the answers was *one grade better*. Attaining this requires some effort and/or monetary investment. ‘It is the kind of thing that hurts a bit to get, but I want to reward myself’. Reward or indulgence was mentioned often. One grade better requires effort, an extra push or endeavour. This it is not so easy; it requires more time and therefore moves the fulfilment of expectations from immediate gratification. This aspect of waiting and dreaming are unexceptional in these times of fast fashion purchasing and easy fulfilment, as this fulfilment happens especially during impulse fashion shopping (Niinimäki, 2018).

This category is linked to rewarding oneself and raising oneself slightly above everyday consumption. ‘Something you don’t necessarily need, but gives you good vibes’. This could be linked to emotional consumption needs and the meaning of garments for building one’s identity; not in a social context in this category, but more on an individual, private level.

‘For me luxury is a quality that can even exist in small details. For example, in a garment it can be good material or a beautiful cut.’

‘Luxury for me is a life that looks and feels like me. Little but good. I search for beautiful and long-lasting, natural materials in my life, and I enjoy my everyday life. I don’t spend, but I do get things I really need: functional, high-quality products, which I really enjoy and are long lasting and durable.’

Several answers could be connected to product attributes such as durability and long-lasting, timeless styles: unique design and quality materials. Sustainability elements could also be identified such as transparency in the supply chain and eco-materials. These show that a sustainable product is understood to be ‘a bit better’ than the average product. In a time when fast fashion is a dominant product type in markets and is connected to low quality products and unsustainability, recognizing this is important. Consumers understand eco-products and sustainability to be ‘a bit better’, something that requires more effort, and could offer a better, more sustainable value base as well as better product quality.

## Everyday luxury

‘First, I thought elegance and high quality, but when I thought more carefully, it could be something very simple, which I enjoy myself.’

The abstract level was visible in the third category of luxury, which can be defined as *everyday luxury*. Everyday luxury contained more experiences than a physical product. It could be linked to a certain moment that ‘lifts you up’, ‘makes your day a bit better’, or adds ‘value to your day’. Very often, these passing moments were connected to a pause, free time, and one’s own wellbeing. Experiences with nature were mentioned several times, which connects them to environmental values and worldview and to the Finnish way of living close to nature.

‘These things do change. Luxury is moments when I can be all alone, in total peace and quiet, I can go to the sauna to relax, hike in a forest and generally be in nature.’

‘Experiences that don’t have to be expensive but create unforgettable memories.’

New experiences linked to learning a new skill, starting a new hobby or services connected to wellbeing were also mentioned.

‘For me, luxury is my own time, my knitting, beautiful knitting yarns, learning a new skill on a course.’

Social moments, such as meeting a friend in a café, a family dinner, or an evening out with a friend were also mentioned.

‘An evening at the theatre, which includes dressing up and dinner.’

‘I don’t want luxury products, but good experiences in my life.’

Finnish consumers respect functionality and easiness in everyday life. Examples of elements of everyday luxury linked to products were attributes that make everyday life somewhat easier, such as easy garment maintenance, but also textiles and garments made in Finland (valuing local production).

Understanding one’s own wellbeing shifts the focus in this category strongly inwards, adding pleasure to one’s own everyday living, cheering oneself up and finding a better balance in life. This may be connected to the Scandinavian worldview and slower way of living, balancing experiences connected to nature, or social moments with family or friends. The aspect of finding happiness and longer-lasting satisfaction through immaterial experiences was strongly present in this category.

Table 6. Finnish consumers understand luxury through three different categories

	Lifestyle	One grade better	Everyday luxury
<b>Quotations</b>	<p>‘Something that exists in only a few pieces, which are especially good, premium quality.’</p> <p>‘Products that are made especially expensive and not needed in everyday life.’</p>	<p>‘It’s the kind of thing that hurts a bit to get, but I want to reward myself.’</p> <p>‘Something you don’t necessarily need but gives you good vibes.’</p>	<p>‘Everything that is above your everyday experience.’</p> <p>‘That lifts you up from your everyday life.’</p> <p>‘A cup of coffee, from a small roastery and good service in a small café.’</p>

			'Experiences in nature.'
			'Moments with friends.'
<b>Attributes</b>	Not easy to attain Only for a few consumers Overall lifestyle, including materialistic consumption Negative luxury=only for the elite, unnecessary products	Product or service Attaining it requires some effort Worth all the effort Monetary investment Indulging yourself	Experience, moments Connected to everyday products or immaterial services Makes your day slightly better Adds value to your day Free time, Wellbeing
<b>Attributes connected to products</b>	Aesthetic products, haute couture Premium-quality brand products International-level high fashion Top quality materials; silk, merino wool, gold	Good materials Eco-products and eco-materials Quality Durable, long-lasting Special, unique Timeless design Transparency in supply chain	Made in Finland Easy to take care of (e.g., water laundry)
<b>Direction</b>	Outwards: looking for social acceptance	Inwards: Rewarding yourself	Inwards: One's own wellbeing

### 9.5. Marimekko case

Marimekko is an iconic Finnish company that represents the Scandinavian lifestyle, and whose production is based on clear design, simple cotton fabric, and bold prints. Marimekko looks for sustainable alternatives suitable for their industrial manufacturing practices. Recently, Marimekko has been testing plant-based natural dyes, which are not so easy to use in industrial manufacturing. Most of the colours used in industrial fabric printing are synthetic, with origins from non-renewable sources (mostly from petroleum production). Many harmful chemicals are used in industrial dyeing and printing processes. For example, synthetic indigo, originating from oil production, is produced through high-energy processes, and even cyanide and formaldehyde are used in its production process.

The blue colour originating from natural Woad plant (*Isatis Tinctoria*), which Marimekko has used in its 2021 autumn collection, was cultivated in Finland. Its origin can even be identified on the field level and in this way its production is transparent and can be defined as super-local. A new kind of relationship with the colour plant farmer is established, which is quite exceptional in the larger scale textile industry. Testing this plant-based dye on an industrial scale has required a great deal of experimentation and negotiation with a farmer to ensure that the dye is suitable for industrial processes and that the end result is successful and durable in Marimekko's processes.

By selecting more sustainable production alternatives, Marimekko aims to reduce its environmental impacts. Natural colours come from renewable sources, and environmental issues such as carbon sequestration can be considered in their cultivation process (Ammayappan and Jose, 2015). Plant roots can sequester carbon, and this activity can be maximized through different agricultural

practices such as crop rotation, selecting plants with deep roots, and using ground cover plants. All these aspects can be realized in Woad cultivation. As the availability of this colour source (plant-based colour) is limited and production (harvesting) only takes place once a year, it will end up in a limited edition collection and result in a new rhythm in industrial manufacturing and in a slower eco-design approach, which is an alternative to fast fashion and its current industrial rhythm.

The designs chosen for this capsule collection are the iconic Marimekko prints Stripe (Piccolo) and Flower (Unikko) which every Marimekko fan easily recognizes. In this way, Marimekko can combine its design value and brand value with environmental values in this capsule collection. Using natural dyes in its production and providing an alternative approach for industrial garment manufacturing enables Marimekko to implement the following values in its product design; super-locality, transparency, natural processes, ecological production, uniqueness, and iconic style.

The image and identity of Finnish design consists of functional, nature inspired, natural-based material choices; clean, simple, and modern in its aesthetic language (visual presentation and forms) (Savolainen, 2008). Marimekko represents all these values in its design. As Finnish design has an ethos of authenticity, uniqueness, but also a yearning to find its own roots, it has a strong connection to the Finnish value base and the Finnish worldview (ibid.). All these aspects are strongly represented in Marimekko, its designs and its cultural meaning. The Finnish blue colour, in combination with the iconic Marimekko print design, and the simple functional garment design of cotton fabric communicates the message to consumers that although it is eco-design, it is a slightly more exceptional, limited edition; more authentic and more sustainable. Super-locality and transparency add nicely to Marimekko's narrative of being a Finnish sustainable design brand. As these aspects are quite rare in the global fashion market, they give a certain 'eco-glitter' to this collection. In this way, Marimekko can be seen as representing eco-luxury, which belongs to the one grade better category – slightly more exceptional but still attainable. Everyday luxury aspects are also offered by the functionality and easy-care aspects. This kind of product gives consumers satisfaction on two levels: first by providing a functional and aesthetic product, and second by offering ideological satisfaction through a sustainable value base.

## **9.6. Conclusions**

One interesting finding of the study was consumers' expectations that luxury garments are more sustainable, production is more transparent and that the companies behind luxury products are more responsible than the average fashion company. This finding provides a new understanding of luxury. Most previous studies have shown that consumers do not think about ethical or environmental issues when considering luxury products. Davies et al. (2012, p.46) highlight that the ethical issues of luxury goods do not interest consumers as much as the ethical considerations connected to other goods. Streit and Davies (2013, 209) point out that 'if luxury good consumption is about hedonism and self-pleasures... it is less likely that altruism would override hedonistic desires.' Yet the findings of the current study in Finland show that a new understanding of luxury might be emerging. The responsibility of companies could be seen in the open answers: the respondents expected luxury to mean more sustainable and more ethical, and companies to be more transparent in their actions. In Streit and Davies' (2013) study, consumers expected to find more information about these issues, whereas in the current study, consumers expected this information to already exist and be available.

In general, the consumers were not so interested in luxury, at least if we define luxury as highly expensive products and an elite lifestyle. The new notion of sustainable eco-luxury with a new kind of ethical consideration and company responsibility might provide a better and more suitable category of luxury products which are easier for larger groups of consumers to accept. Streit and Davies (2013) found the same in their study. They documented a lack of fundamental interest in ethical luxury fashion. Consumers were more interested in quality, materials, and timeless design than the aspect of luxury (ibid.).

To succeed in luxury markets, products or services need to fulfil consumers' expectations. As Davies et al. (2012, p.14) highlight 'for ethical-luxury to work, it would therefore need to enhance (or at least not destroy) these self-pleasure and hedonic aspects of luxury consumption.'. These self-pleasures and hedonistic aspects are tied to cultural context. Accordingly, it is important to understand the market segment, geographical location and what this framing brings to consumers' worldviews and lifestyles and how this value base affects consumers' luxury understanding and the elements that consumers look for in luxury—not only the self-pleasure and hedonistic aspects of luxury consumption, but also the fundamental values in their worldview in particular context.

Based on this small study, it can be stated that in the Scandinavian context, luxury is a well-functioning, high-quality and longer-lasting aesthetic product or service that offers wellbeing or pleasure. Moreover, luxury products and experiences can also be based on Scandinavian consumption values and the special relationship with nature. Eco-luxury in the Scandinavian context also includes the company's responsibility and in the best case, local production, and more transparent production, as can be noted in the Marimekko case. The eco-aspect in luxury means a smaller environmental impact and slower design and manufacturing processes. Moreover, the aspect of slowness means more consideration and less production in total (more accurate production, capsule collections, limited editions). Sustainability in this context can mean transparency, more local production, and even a new kind of relationship with the farmers who produce colour plants. Scandinavian design 'language' presents clear, long-lasting aesthetics and a well-functioning product that is easy to wear and maintain.

The slow approach in industrial production also provides an alternative to current fast mass-manufacturing and might positively differentiate sustainable eco-luxury in consumers' minds. As Strauss (2015, p.88) highlighted while studying the aspect of slow production in the fashion field, it might require 'recalibrating of the way they think, reconsidering how they've grown accustomed to getting things done and re-examining inherited belief systems and practices at the very heart of their chosen fields.' This points out that sustainable eco-luxury may not only be a way of focusing on and implementing the environmental value base, but also an option to do things differently. Production and even its scale can be considered more, and even a new kind of partnering can be constructed in the local context. This aspect enables a real alternative to be constructed as a sustainable eco-luxury.

As pointed out by Karaosman et al. (2020), when a company is developing a proactive attitude towards sustainability, especially in a complex business environment such as fashion, it can create a competitive advantage. The unique characteristics of a product or production can create a pioneering role for a company, as it benefits from being a 'first mover' and doing something differently to its competitors (ibid.). Moreover, cooperation in the supply chain is fundamentally important, especially when limited resources are in question (Govindan, 2018). As the Marimekko case shows, and as supported by Karaosman et al. (2020), knowledge-sharing and joint learning among different partners are essential when new sustainable practices are under development.

Although the value of luxury markets is decreasing due to, for example, large scale copying, this study highlights possible options for luxury brands. It is not only high quality and monetary value that are associated with luxury items; authenticity and true narrative are also now more connected than ever to luxury brands and luxury products. These, as well as sustainability, are becoming increasingly important aspects for consumers, even in luxury markets. Locality and cultural context should be taken into account and seen as positive references for designing unique products and generating small-scale production (e.g., capsule collections) that could include a nonmaterialist value base, for example, ecological or sustainable values. Consumers also eagerly seek unique experiences more than unique products, in connection to their sustainability worldview. Therefore luxury brands could provide immaterial experiences more than material ones. Moreover, consumers expect luxury brands to be more sustainable and more transparent in their actions than average companies, which forms a new sustainable value basis for luxury brands.

### **Theoretical contributions**

-Consumers' understanding of luxury is changing and is moving away from status products to services.

-Consumers' understanding of luxury has the following directions: outwards (looking for social acceptance and differentiation), inwards (rewarding oneself), inwards (enhancing one's own wellbeing).

-Consumers expect greater responsibility, transparency and sustainability from luxury products and the companies behind them than from other product categories.

### **Managerial implications**

-Focusing on sustainable eco-luxury provides alternative ways of designing and producing and even creating a slower rhythm or smaller scale in industrial production.

- It is important to take into consideration the geographical location, cultural context and consumers' worldview and lifestyle to be able to produce products whose value bases are suitable for consumers in specific locations.

-Consumers respect authenticity and a true narrative behind a product and this can be enhanced through transparency.

### **Acknowledgements**

This research was supported by the Academy of Finland's Strategic Research Council, grant number 327 330 Bio Based Dyes and Pigments for Colour Palette (BioColour).

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