



dna merch

Sector: Garments and Textile

Region: Based in Germany, product sold in Germany and the EU

[dna merch](#) sells basic and custom printed organic t-shirts sewn by a self-organised social worker cooperative in Croatia.

dna merch's main sustainability claim is: "made with dignity, worn with attitude". This claim directly refers to the workers who sew the t-shirts and who work under conditions of mutual respect, equality and inclusion. dna merch uses one percent of its sales to promote better working conditions by supporting workers in South Asia's textile industry.



Mindset

Life Cycle Thinking: dna merch is able to track all the steps involved in the creation of their t-shirts back to the yarn production, knitting and dyeing of the fabric in India. More guidance to consumers on the use and disposal phases of the product is planned. For instance, dna merch is seeking cooperation with initiatives that recycle old textiles into new and reusable fabrics.

Hotspots Analysis Approach: A comprehensive hotspots analysis was not undertaken. The company takes steps towards a more sustainable garment industry through the use of efficient materials and processes. Conventional cotton growing uses more water than organic cotton growing, thus the company's t-shirts are made from organic cotton. Also, the front and back parts of the t-shirts are printed before the final sewing step in order to minimize the wastage of material in case of bad prints.

Mainstreaming Sustainability: The claim is directly linked to the brand and new or improved products developed by dna merch will most likely be also influenced by it. This is because the claim is an integrated part of the entire decision-making and management process of the brand.

Principle 1: Reliability

The cooperative is certified by [SA8000](#) and [ISO 14001](#). The printing partner is certified after [OEKOTEX100](#). The raw material of the yarn is [GOTS](#) certified.



There is a considerable amount of scientific evidence available on the impact that worker cooperatives and trade unions can have on economies, communities, and the general wellbeing of workers. However, dna merch recognizes that it is hard to know about the exact working conditions of every person that has been directly or indirectly involved in the value chain of their t-shirts. Another major challenge for the garments and textile industry is the transportation and logistics steps in the supply chain. In order to address this, dna merch keeps track of new developments and campaigns such as the [ITF Fair transport campaign](#). The company regularly visits the self-organized workers of the cooperative where the t-shirts are produced, asking them what it means to work in the cooperative, what improvements are needed and what could be done by dna merch.

Parts of the t-shirt manufacturing process are verified to external standards. By working closely with its partner, the self-organised worker cooperative in Croatia, and having established a cooperative relationship with them, dna merch tries to meet this principle fully.

Principle 2: Relevance

The claim exceeds regulatory requirements of both the production country (Croatia) and the consumption country (Germany) since there is no regulation on the production of garments under inclusive conditions.



The subject of the claim is a major driver of the socio-economic sustainability performance of the product: it is integral to the way the product is produced ('made with dignity').



Principle 3: Clarity



The dna merch website provides clear information on the product, including worker portraits, a digital tour along the supply chain (from Bangalore in India to Berlin in Germany), and instructions concerning care of the product after purchase. The company also provides an exemplary [cost calculation](#) for end consumers so that people understand better the components that make up the final price of the product.

The message about the way the t-shirts are produced ('made with dignity') is clear and refers to good social conditions for workers (in this case, in a self-organised worker cooperative). Also, the second half of the claim 'worn with attitude' is clear regarding the consumer use stage.



Example of a dna merch basic t-shirt

Principle 4: Transparency



The website offers a tour through the supply chain, allowing consumers to trace the information behind the claim by contacting the main partner in Croatia and other partners further down the value chain. A list of all partners is available on the [website](#).

Information on the supply chain, including names and locations of partners and accredited organizations, is made available on the website.

Principle 5: Accessibility



Information is accessible at the point of purchase (online and offline). Every consumer purchasing a dna merch t-shirt will get a postcard with a picture of the workers and information on the company's social approach.

Information is accessible through: on-pack (in print on the neck area of each t-shirt); points of sale (hangtags and postcards); social media ([Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)), [website](#) and leaflets.

Principle 6: Three Dimensions of Sustainability



Environmental: The t-shirts are made from organic cotton and produced on demand.

Organic cotton uses less water than using conventional cotton and the 'on demand' production process avoids the fast fashion cycle with its well-known environmental implications.

Social: Improved working conditions and a sense of equality and inclusion.

Economic: Creation of more economic opportunities for small producers by offering more direct access to international clients through dna merch's production network.

The claim analyzed in this exercise addresses mainly the social and economic dimensions, although other claims made on the same product also address the environmental dimension. Future challenges will lie primarily in the environmental area, should the company further expand the list of fashion products it produces, as it may not be easy to access organic and environmentally friendly/less harmful materials, especially from an economic perspective.



Principle 7: Behaviour Change and Longer Term Impact



The communication strategy involves sharing online petitions, articles and events on better working conditions and the sustainable garment industry through social media channels. The company conducted one follow-up survey after its first crowdfunding campaign and plans to conduct surveys on social media more strategically in the future.

From the first survey amongst its crowd-funders, when asked about their main motivation for having participated in the crowdfunding campaign, 53,3% of participants mentioned the support for workers in South Asia and 23,4% the fact that the shirts are produced in a democratic worker cooperative. Only 2,3% mentioned the fact that the t-shirt is made by organic materials as the main driver to support the campaign.

dna merch aims to inspire behavior change through an inclusive language ('worn with attitude'). The social conditions of production of the t-shirts are important to the company's supporters. The biggest challenges will lie within the strategic monitoring of changes in the behaviour of its partners and consumers, especially considering dna merch is a still a small social startup.

Principle 8: Multi-Channel and Innovative Approach



dna merch uses social media (Facebook and Instagram), its website, events and workshops to communicate its message and promote its products. Also, direct telemarketing is used for business-to-business relations. Social media posts aim to inspire action. The design of the t-shirts mostly has a humorous note as well as almost always has a political message.

Consumers can call or write directly to the company, as well as interact on social medial channels. In the future, dna merch plans to organize specific events to bring consumers together, and also to provide them with a campaign-builder page, where they will be able to plan and customize their own 'fair t-shirt' campaigns.



Example of a dna merch t-shirt that conveys a political message with a humorous note.

Principle 9: Collaboration



The business plan of dna merch is based on the values and indicators of the [Economy for the Common Good Report](#).

The company reports that it aims to keep observing and learning from existing standards.

dna merch is a startup with one product and, as such, it did not involve many stakeholders in the development of the claim. However, the stakeholders and partners relevant to the production of the t-shirts were part of the process of the claim creation.

Principle 10: Comparability



This principle states that product comparisons should be used only where it really helps the consumer to make sustainable choices. In this claim, dna merch opted for not addressing this aspect.