

Artisanal alpaca garments from the Central Andes: slow fashion practices for cultural sustainability

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Summary:

This dissertation explores the artisanal production of alpaca garments in South America through a qualitative multiple case study, focusing on eight social enterprises in Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. It traces the alpaca fiber's journey from the Andean highlands to its transformation into unique artisanal garments. By analyzing the business models of cooperatives, family businesses, and foundations, and through the lens of the "slow fashion" movement and scholarship, this research highlights the potential of alternative fashion practices rooted in reflexive local processes that value artisanal work and material diversity. The artisanal work is primarily carried out by female weavers and spinners who convey their traditional knowledge and emotions through alpaca garments. The dissertation also sheds light on the inequalities within the alpaca textile production chain, particularly affecting indigenous Andean herder communities. The featured social enterprises exemplify practices that prioritize sustainability and community involvement, reinforcing a sense of identity and cultural heritage. Ultimately, the study envisions a fashion future centered on local sustainability, with Andean enterprises paving the way by merging slow fashion with traditional crafts.

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List of abbreviations

| | |
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| BMC | Business Model Canvas |
| COPROAGROCAN | Cooperative of producers of Andean camelids – “Cooperativa de productores agropecuarios de camélidos andinos” |
| I | Interviewee |
| INE | National Statistics Agency – “Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de Chile” |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| HxN | Done by Us Foundation – “HechoxNosotros” |
| MIDAGRI | Ministry of Agriculture in Peru – “Ministerio de Desarrollo Agrario y Riego” |
| PETA | People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals |
| RAS | Responsible Alpaca Standard |

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

“While fashion is at the heart of our culture and important to our relationships, our aesthetic desires and identity, the fashion and textile sector’s lack of attention to moral and environmental issues is socially and ecologically undermining” (Fletcher, 2014, p. 118).

The fashion industry faces several “environmental and ethical challenges”, including concerns about garment workers' conditions, animal welfare and overall, the growing unsustainable production and consumption of fashion items (Gwilt, Payne, & Ruthschilling, 2019b, p. xxv). Nevertheless, apart from “novelty-driven consumerism”, fashion and material goods are important to the well-being of the user. They can be both, a source of empowerment and identity construction, while meeting fundamental needs such as warmth and comfort (Fletcher, 2014, pp. 142–143). In particular, alternative fashion practices can contribute to identity construction by developing an aesthetic sense based on sustainable values.

Alternatives exist and they are often within a “frame of localism” where place and communities mixed with distinctiveness change priorities on “how we dress and the way to decide how much is enough” (Fletcher, 2022, pp. 130–131). Local production cannot replace globalized production chains but it can complement and influence them (Fletcher, 2014, p. 169). Jansen (2020) highlights the importance of decolonizing fashion beyond the “Euro-American canon of normativity” by focusing instead on the plurality of epistemologies influencing the “act of fashioning the body”. In Latin America, there is growing interest in revitalizing traditional methods and processes while embracing slower and local practices (Gwilt, Payne, & Ruthschilling, 2019a, p. 263). These evolving perspectives highlight the potential of local and place-based initiatives to drive meaningful change in the fashion industry, promoting more inclusive and sustainable approaches to clothing and production.

The rise of sustainable fashion initiatives reflects a growing awareness and response to environmental and ethical concerns in the industry. Fashion items and behaviors perceived as sustainable have flourished to address "... environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption and production practices" (Mukendi, Davies, Glozer, & McDonagh, 2020, p. 2874). At the same time, sustainable business models have emerged to analyze the way companies can propose alternative values beyond "narrow for-profit and profit-maximizing models" (Schaltegger, Hansen, & Lüdeke-Freund, 2016, p. 5). This evolution demonstrates a turn towards fashion practices that prioritize sustainability and innovative business models.

A business model defines "how an organization operates" (Kozlowski, Searcy, & Bardecki, 2018). Sustainable business models expand beyond traditional cost-focused approaches to integrate social missions and life cycle perspectives (Sparviero, 2019, p. 235). Social enterprises prioritize social impact (Qastharin, 2015), while organizations in the solidarity economy emphasize collective wellbeing over individual profit (Caillé, 2003). These alternative models blend economic objectives with social and environmental responsibilities (Schaltegger et al., 2016, p. 6). Exploring various sustainable business models in the fashion industry highlights the diverse values emerging from artisanal work and cultural sustainability.

Inspired by slow fashion and decolonial approaches, this study intends to contribute to the theoretical discussion on sustainable local wool economies, by mapping and comparing the business models of local artisanal alpaca garments initiatives in the Central Andes. The spotlight is on eight social enterprises based in Ecuador, Peru and Chile. Those are hybrid organizations, which aim to create both social and economic value by collaborating with Andean herders and artisans.

1.2. Problem statement: shifting the focus to Andean herders and artisans

Alpaca fiber is a valuable resource that offers economic opportunities for Andean herders and artisans living in the Central Andean region in South America. Despite being marketed as luxurious and sustainable, the production of these textiles often exposes profound inequalities. Andean herders in rural communities often get

underpaid due to dependence on intermediaries. Artisans also face challenges accessing markets, as structural barriers limit their ability to add value in an industry increasingly dominated by mass production. Local wool economies struggle with these issues as producers must adapt their designs to meet consumer demands, but their higher prices compared to industrial products make it difficult to compete. This section outlines the key problems in artisanal alpaca fiber production in the Andean region.

Alpaca fiber textiles are marketized and perceived by consumers as sustainable and luxurious items (Rusinko & Faust, 2016, p. 25). Alpacas provide a luxury animal hair fiber “... softer than cashmere and lighter, warmer, and more durable than wool” (Karthik, Rathinamoorthy, & Ganesan, 2015, pp. 67–69). These qualities are embraced by consumers interested in “simple luxury” which involves going back to the “origins and nature” (Figuroa, Marina, & Benites Leiva, 2023, p. 69). This trend is based, among others, on environmental concerns driving a switch from synthetic fibers to natural ones, those obtained from plants and animals (Dissanayake & Perera, 2016). In general, there is a turn in the fashion industry to the origin and how textiles are made (Miller, Isaksen, Burgess, Klepp, & Tobiasson, 2022). In this context, focusing on Andean herders and artisans in the alpaca sector reveals the underlying structural inequalities within the fashion industry.

Alpacas are the source of economic livelihood for families in the Central Andes. These camelids are bred in the Andean highlands of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, northern Chile, and northwestern Argentina. In the region, alpacas are managed mainly by small producers that rely on family systems and communal natural pastures (FAO, 1996, p. iv). In Peru, where 80% of the global alpaca production is concentrated, 82.459 Andean herders rely on commercializing alpaca fiber and meat (MIDAGRI, 2021). These communities are often isolated and have limited access to basic public services, increasing their vulnerability when engaging with the fashion industry.

Significant inequalities are perpetuated throughout the production chain, impacting Andean herders and artisans. In the global market, the value of alpaca textiles increases by 700% from raw fiber to finished clothing. In Peru, the world's largest alpaca producer, fiber is priced at €5.57 per kilogram, tops (scoured and combed) at €9.75, yarn at €27.86, and sweaters at €37.15 per kilogram (Ministerio de Comercio Exterior y Turismo del Perú, 2020). As a result, the communities involved in

alpaca herding and artisanal textile production receive disproportionately low compensation compared to the profits generated from the sale of finished garments.

Luxury brands have also faced scandals involving abusive practices toward local producers. In 2024, Bloomberg journalists revealed that the luxury fashion firm Loro Piana paid rural indigenous communities in Peru €260.39 per kilogram for shearing vicuñas, whose wool is later used to produce sweaters sold for around €8,369.73 in cities like New York, Milan, and London (Rochabrun, 2024). Vicuñas, the wild ancestors of alpacas, produce the finest wool in the world, yet these communities struggle to process and commercialize such "luxurious" products, highlighting the stark disparities in the fashion industry (Rochabrun, 2024).

A major challenge for camelid producers is enhancing market access and adding value to their products (FAO, 2024, p. 11). In the Andean region, alpaca herders and weavers often rely on intermediaries to sell their goods and face numerous barriers, including racism, discrimination, and organizational obstacles, which hinder their ability to access markets and compete in a globalized fashion industry (Akins, 2022; Amarilla, Gardetti, & Gabriel, 2020; Miller & Fredriksen, 2022; Page-Reeves, 1998). To address these issues and highlight the importance of camelids in food security, economic development, and cultural significance, the United Nations has declared 2024 the International Year of Camelids (FAO, 2024, p. 10).

Initiatives focused on "collaborative and place-based practices" offer promising solutions for local wool economies (Smith, Ehrnström-Fuentes, Hagolani-Albov, Klepp, & Tobiasson, 2022, pp. 151–153). One example is Fibershed, a movement that began in Northern California in 2013 with the goal of creating "socially and environmentally regenerative local textile economies" (Harrison, 2018, p. 90). This sustainable fashion initiative has flourished across fiber farms in the United States and Canada, emphasizing the integration of "skills, materials, and land" within rural communities (Harrison, 2018, p. 91). Fibershed advocates to maintain local fiber manufacturing systems of wool and cotton, in its interconnection with agricultural systems (Fibershed, 2024). Similarly, the Argentinian Foundation HechoxNosotros (HxN) works with Andean camelid fibers, such as alpaca wool, to address the disconnect between consumers and marginalized artisans, and to promote sustainable business models

(HxN, 2024). These projects highlight the potential of sustainable practices that focus on the needs of producers, herders, and artisans.

This thesis aims to enhance the “visibility” of local wool initiatives, specifically focusing on social enterprises that commercialize alpaca textiles in the Central Andean Region. It maps various initiatives—whether private, cooperative, or public funded—that are working to improve the position of Andean herders and artisans by providing fair trade opportunities and new channels for commercialization. This exploratory study aims to uncover the nuances contained within social enterprises and their business models, including their actual and potential sustainability values. By emphasizing localism, artisanal craftsmanship, and material diversity, this research explores alternative approaches to “fashioning the body” while addressing the systemic inequalities embedded in the alpaca fiber value chain.

1.3. Research questions

This thesis focuses on social enterprises engaged in crafting alpaca garments across the Central Andes, specifically in Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. The study aims to compare the business models of these enterprises, with an emphasis on their sustainable value propositions. By examining these local initiatives, the research critically explores the fashion industry through the lens of the slow fashion movement. The dissertation addresses the following research questions:

1. What are some examples of alpaca garment social enterprises in the Central Andes? How have these initiatives evolved over time, and what challenges have they encountered?
2. How do the business models of these social enterprises crafting alpaca garments contribute to community development and economic empowerment?

1.4. Structure of the thesis

The dissertation starts with a literature review (Chapter 2) on artisanal wool initiatives and their impact on local communities, Andean herders and weavers. It examines case studies of social enterprises in the Andean region which commercialize garments from camelid fibers, particularly alpaca, llama and vicuña. The findings highlight both the structural challenges and opportunities in artisanal production, including economic empowerment and cultural sustainability.

Chapter 3 develops the theoretical framework, both from slow fashion approaches and sustainable business models in social enterprises. The research describes the slow fashion movement and localizing practices in wool economies which value artisanal work for its quality, exclusivity, authenticity and equity. The following sections analyze social economy practices and sustainable business models in the textile industry. While social enterprises uphold a social mission, sustainable business models turn the focus on social and environmental costs and benefits. Both theoretical business models embrace a plurality of values beyond traditional cost-driven approaches.

The methodology (Chapter 4) describes the qualitative multiple-case study approach to this exploratory study of social enterprises commercializing alpaca textiles in the region. It introduces the methods employed: collection of secondary data, as well as semi-structured interviews to key informants from social enterprises in Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. In addition, it describes the process pursued for data analysis of the interviews, a thematic analysis.

Chapter 5 examines the results of the dissertation. It describes the alpaca production chain and the geographical distribution in the Central Andean Region. After that, the business models of the different social enterprises are introduced focusing on the plurality of values promoted by such organizations, both artisanal work (spinning and weaving) as well as the special properties of alpaca fiber reared by Andean herders. Chapter 6 closes with a final reflection on the values highlighted by the different social enterprises identified as slow fashion practices.

The dissertation concludes (Chapter 7) with a hopeful vision for a fashion industry that values local and sustainable practices. It emphasizes the role of the eight social enterprises in the Andean highlands that integrate slow fashion principles with

traditional artisanal techniques, contributing to both cultural revitalization and economic development within marginalized communities. The research reiterates the importance of further research on the role of policymakers and consumer awareness.

2. Artisanal textile initiatives with camelid fibers in the Andean region

As consumers increasingly seek quality and authenticity, traditional practices such as hand spinning, natural dyeing, weaving, and knitting offer significant economic opportunities for local communities. However, they encounter barriers to commercialization, including structural issues like racism and discrimination, as well as organizational challenges related to market access and product positioning. This section discusses literature on local initiatives working with camelid fibers and marginalized communities in the Andean region. Such initiatives include cooperatives, purposeful enterprises, as well as foundations and fashion design entrepreneurs from and working with Andean herders and artisans in Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina.

Bolivian female knitting cooperatives encounter numerous obstacles in securing fair compensation and market access, underscoring the exploitation within global production chains. In her study of a Bolivian female knitting cooperative, Page-Reeves (1998, p. 85) reveals that grassroots organizations face significant challenges in securing credit, creating fashionable designs that appeal to consumers, and accessing markets in industrialized countries. The women knitters are often forced to rely on middlemen, middle-class entrepreneurs, who sell their alpaca sweaters in the U.S. for €186,17 or €279,25, while the women in Cochabamba, Bolivia, earn only between €4,65 and €18,62 (Page-Reeves, 1998, p. 91). As Page-Reeves (1998, p. 83) notes:

Yet, just as the romantic image of a woman spinning may belie the monotony, drudgery and hardship of rural life, the beauty and simplicity of handmade sweaters can mask the harsh and complex reality in which handknits are produced and sold.

Artisans aim to generate value through their skills while end consumers demand exclusive and original products (Larios-Francia, Burgos, & Jimenez, 2023). In Peru, Larios-Francia, Burgos & Jiménez (2023) study 12 purposeful enterprises, designers and entrepreneurs, who contribute to artisan communities by providing a market for their crafts and improving the design, and management so “textile traditions can live”. The authors highlight the importance of the “professionalization” process of artisan collectives and associations to manage the business and develop marketing and management skills (Larios-Francia et al., 2023). Beyond being a bridge between

supply and demand, such purposeful enterprises should focus on improving the “...systematization of knowledge, alliances with academia and government entities, participatory organizational culture with knowledge sharing, continuous learning through training and knowledge transfer through educational projects for young people” (Larios-Francia et al., 2023, p. 133).

In Latin America, “traditional weaving with an ethnic identity” has been proposed by the public and private sector as a “development strategy” for communities at risk (Del Solar, 2019). Del Solar (2019) describes her work with female weaver’s associations in Peru since the 80’s. The author explains the several challenges faced by weaver associations, such as the fact that the price of the alpaca garments hardly covered the materials and labor, and the short duration of the projects, which would be around two years, not enough to evaluate impact and sustainability (Del Solar, 2019, pp. 172–173). Del Solar (2019) conducts a study of a 10-year project with Quechua-speaking women around Cusco. She concludes that women sell the artisanal textiles to obtain cash and spend it on their children's education since their sustenance comes from farming. The author (Del Solar, 2019, p. 173) describes:

They learned weaving as young girls, knitting their own garments; later, they sold these to distributors in their own communities at very low prices. When they do organize, they learn to improve quality and raise prices. Communal networks and weavers’ centers give them an opportunity to exercise their right to work and generate income.

Sustainable luxury offers a pathway to revalue the artisanal production of remote communities, empowering local producers and promoting cultural diversity (Amarilla et al., 2020). Amarilla et al. (2020) study the revitalization of the vicuña poncho at “Cooperativa Laguna Blanca”, an artisanal cooperative in northern Argentina. The results highlight how artisans are empowered through environmentally friendly practices and cultural community practices, from vicuña shearing to the commercialization of the final product as a sustainable luxury item.

The emphasis on cultural sustainability is shared by Akins (2022, pp. 73–74) whose doctoral thesis focuses on alpaca weaving in Quechua indigenous communities in Peru. The author describes the conflicting aspects of mass tourism in Cusco, artisans having to compete with “machine-made synthetic imitations of authentic handmade products”, and structural discrimination faced by Quechua People. To

compete with those lower prices, artisans might favor less costly and time-consuming processes, cutting out important traditional ecological knowledge (Akins, 2022, p. 94). Akins (2022, p. 73) describes the struggle of communities as follows:

A handmade textile that would take one full month to weave (not including shearing the alpaca, spinning the wool, cultivating and dyeing the plants, and setting the warp) would sell in the typical tourist market for approximately 200 PEN (soles), the equivalent to \$65 CAD or \$50 USD [€46,41 euros], when in fact it would need to sell for over 800-1000 PEN (\$275-\$344 CAD) [€199,42 - €249,27] to economically support a weaver in a sustainable way.

Crafts are cultural expression and a “spiritual experience” which involves creating something with the hands and body parts from raw materials that become something else, “hopefully something of utility and beauty” (Miller et al., 2022, pp. 102–103). Gardetti & Valero (2023, pp. 130–140) describe the intimate connection between indigenous llama herders in Argentina and the rituals and meanings behind the artisanal textiles. Valero reflects on her personal experience raising llamas and the traditional knowledge and “spiritual” bond between nature, textiles, and culture. Her collection, “Señalada”, and her brand, “Tejedores Andinos”, which debuted at the 2022 Argentinian Fashion Week, exemplify this intimate connection (Gardetti & Valero, 2023, pp. 130–140).

Similarly, Animaná, another Argentinian social enterprise and sustainable luxury brand, embodies this connection between craft and culture through its specialization in fiber garments made from Patagonian and Andean camelids (Figuroa et al., 2023). The brand operates both online and through a physical store in Buenos Aires, exporting its textiles to France, the United States, and Canada (Figuroa et al., 2023). Founded in 2008, Animaná also inspired the creation of the HxN (Hecho x Nosotros) Foundation, a platform that supports artisans and SMEs in South America by facilitating access to the global market and fashion production chain (Figuroa et al., 2023, pp. 74–75). The products of Animaná are priced between €59,63 and €186,35 for clothing, €186,35 to €465,88 for home linens like blankets, and €18,63 to €74,54 for accessories (Figuroa et al., 2023, p. 74). Positioned as a green and culturally rich alternative, this sustainable luxury brand offers timeless clothing and high-quality textiles (Figuroa et al., 2023, pp. 72–73).

The initiatives described in the previous paragraphs emphasize the role of Andean herders and artisans, addressing both the challenges they face and the potential values of economic empowerment and cultural sustainability. The next chapter offers an overview on sustainable fashion as the theoretical underpinning for analyzing initiatives in alpaca fiber textiles within the Central Andes region. It introduces the social and environmental challenges of the fashion industry and the different sustainability proposals in the field. The section closes with a special focus on the slow fashion movement and its impact on cultural sustainability through the revitalization of artisanal processes to “fashion the body”.

3. Exploring slow fashion and sustainable business models: a theoretical framework

3.1. The slow fashion movement: promoting equity through localism

But why does the fashion industry persist in inflicting such serious environmental devastation on the planet? The short answer is: because under capitalism it has to. Corporations need to maximize profits. To do this they must acquire the component parts of their products as cheaply as possible. Other than under a system of slavery, labor has to be paid for, whereas nature is seemingly available for free (Hoskins, 2022, p. 142).

Fast fashion relies on "cheap fabrics, low wages, and worker exploitation" (Clark, 2008, p. 428). While fashion can drive excessive consumption, it also plays a role in expressing identity and connecting with cultural and emotional contexts (Langdown, 2014, p. 34). In contrast, sustainable fashion seeks to foster a meaningful relationship between consumers and producers, linking them to the natural world and the artisans behind their clothing (Fletcher, 2014). This chapter explores the slow fashion movement with a focus on localism, emphasizing the care for both producers and their local environments.

Slow culture questions economic growth and frames the fashion sector as part of a larger system, society and planetary (Fletcher, 2010, p. 264). As Fletcher notes, "Like fast food, fast fashion is mass-produced and standardized... Sales and growth are driven by maximizing economies of scale and minimizing costs" (Fletcher, 2010, p. 260). The costs of growth are not borne by corporations but by society, workers and the environment (Fletcher, 2010, p. 261). The economic growth that equals business and sales growth induces pollution, resource depletion, climate change, and abusive working conditions (Fletcher, 2010).

The term slow fashion was coined by Fletcher in 2007, and it refers to a socially conscious movement opposite to the fast fashion system (Jung & Jin, 2014, pp. 511–512). Jung & Jin (2014) identified five dimensions of the slow fashion movement in the US: (1) caring for producers and local communities for sustainable life (equity and localism); (2) connoting history for sustainable perceived value of the product

(authenticity); (3) seeking diversity (exclusivity); and (4) maximizing product lifespan and efficiency for a sustainable environment (functionality). Localism advocates for a shift from globalized production dominated by large corporations towards a model that emphasizes local knowledge, uniqueness, and authenticity (Fletcher, 2014, pp. 168–169).

In the literature, authors call for a “reflexive (re)localizing process” to reconnect with the local context and local ownership by promoting narratives of garments¹ as “meaningful and relational part of daily life” (DuPuis & Goodman, 2005, p. 280; Smith et al., 2022, p. 159). Long-term sustainability implies promoting a culture where quality supersedes quantity, and aesthetics are not value-free but based on “values, on skill, on carefully produced fibers; clothes that are conscientious, sustainable and beautiful” (Fletcher, 2008, p. 179). By embracing locally rooted practices, garments are valued not just for their aesthetic appeal but for their deeper connection to culture and sustainability.

Following a slow fashion approach, Clark (2008) highlights the value of employing local social and natural resources to promote transparent production systems and less intermediation. Unlike mass-produced fast fashion, which often obscures the harsh realities of sourcing and labor conditions, slow fashion focuses on creating more sustainable and sensorial garments (Clark, 2008, p. 440). In this context, “new beauty” is defined not just by visual appeal but by the abstract and emotional factors that influence people's choices (Clark, 2008, pp. 441–442).

A key question remains: “... what and how much should be produced?” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 157). Smith et al. (2022, p. 157) argue that focusing on the lifetime of each garment and addressing the real needs of the community are essential for implementing localization initiatives that drive transformative change. Addressing these issues will be key to fostering reflexive re(localizing) practices, both environmentally sustainable and responsive to community needs.

These (re)localizing practices are integral to a broader shift towards sustainability in the fashion industry. So, what exactly is sustainable fashion? Is it

¹ Fletcher (2008, p. 179) differentiates between fashion, clothing and garment. While fashion carries symbolic value, clothing serves a functional purpose, and the intersection of fashion and functionality, where emotional needs are met, is described as garments.

ethical, eco, or slow fashion? The concept of sustainable fashion began to take shape in the 1960s as consumer awareness grew, with eco-fashion and anti-fur campaigns gaining momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by the rise of ethical clothing in the 1990s (Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates, 2016, p. 400). Ethical fashion focuses on fair trade and the equitable treatment of workers, eco-fashion emphasizes environmentally friendly practices, and slow fashion promotes a design approach that values local production and ethical labor practices (Mukendi et al., 2020, pp. 2877–2878). Key barriers to sustainable fashion include a lack of transparency in global production chains, the excessive volume of garment production, and problems with “greenwashing” (Henninger et al., 2016, pp. 401–402). Addressing these barriers is essential for driving meaningful progress towards a more sustainable fashion industry.

Collectively, these approaches, ethical, eco-friendly and slow fashion, lay the ground for a more sustainable industry. While pragmatic interventions aim to “do better”, transformative strategies challenge the consumerist system (Mukendi et al., 2020, p. 2878). Slow fashion, with its emphasis on reflexive (re)localizing processes, exemplifies these transformative efforts by shifting focus towards producers, nature, and the real consumer needs, emotional and functional. The next section explores slow fashion practices in local wool economies, emphasizing their role in promoting cultural sustainability within artisan communities.

3.2. Local wool textiles for cultural sustainability

The textile industry is based on a system in which people have “lost touch with how their clothing relates to the living landscape” where human and non-human beings interact (Smith et al., 2022, p. 157). Localism advocates for a significant shift from the “monoculture of globalized production” dominated by large corporations, urging a return to local knowledge, distinctiveness, and authenticity (Fletcher, 2014, pp. 168–169). This section explores wool economies by examining efforts to revitalize cultural heritage in indigenous artisan herder communities in Peru, alongside initiatives to re(localize) wool production in Poland and Norway. Both examples show documented local efforts towards cultural sustainability in the fashion industry. A decolonial

approach to fashion design informs the exploration of these wool economies as a “multitude of possibilities” and memories “materialized in other ways to fashion the body” (Jansen, 2020, p. 817, 832).

A decolonial approach to fashion design intends to reveal the complex interaction between modernity, coloniality and power dynamics (Teunissen, 2023). As such, it implies upholding diversity: “plurality”, including narratives previously marginalized and silenced by the dominant system and its occidental and Eurocentric roots (Teunissen, 2023). In the context of fashion design, Gardetti emphasizes the significance of studying indigenous cultures in Latin America, where the connection between the living and non-living realms is deeply intertwined with identity (Gardetti & Valero, 2023, pp. 34–35). Angela Jansen (2020) further proposes viewing fashion as an active process, “the act of fashioning the body”, to critique the exclusion of diverse ways of self-expression due to global power imbalances and the dominance of Euro-American norms (Jansen, 2020, p. 817).

Following Soini & Birkeland (2014), cultural sustainability is understood as “the ability for cultural heritage, practices, and processes to survive through changes despite stressors” (Akins, 2022, p. 69). Akins suggests the importance of “multi-generational revitalization of cultural heritage” through the commercialization of the alpaca textiles of small-scale producers from Quechua indigenous communities (2022, pp. 87–90). Adding more intermediaries in the production chain reduces the connection between producers and consumers while contributing to increasing the carbon footprint. By reducing intermediaries and enhancing direct connections between consumers and producers, there is potential for greater cultural resilience and increased consumer stewardship about their role in the production of alpaca garments (Akins, 2022, p. 88).

Cultural textile traditions show the deep connection between “makers, their craft, materials, and the cultural relationships that sustain and transmit these skills and knowledge” (Miller et al., 2022, pp. 102-103). Textiles are intangible cultural heritage inherited from the past which have to be understood from “our current way of living and being” (Miller et al., 2022, pp. 89, 105). The transmission of cultural textile traditions is challenged by globalization, mechanization, and the rise of fast fashion. This is even

more present for those affected by colonial oppression, where the intent of the oppressor was to disrupt tradition, language and culture (Miller et al., 2022, p. 88).

Inspired by the experiences of Sea Sámi of northern Norway, Miller et al. (2022) reflect on “textile art and craft production” as part of cultural sustainability. The revitalization of Sámi culture involves textile traditions as part of a process of restoring cultural pride and identity (Miller et al., 2022, pp. 99-102). The authors reflect on the role of textiles traditions in cultural revitalization as follows:

If the warp threads of a cloth were the land and the materials, and the weft were the people and their ways, when woven together, they become a cultural expression of deep integration. It is a relationship with one’s past, present and future, through the engagement with materials, with textiles (Miller et al., 2022, pp. 102-103).

In a similar vein, Brown & Vacca (2022) explore how the interaction between craft and design can support cultural sustainability within the fashion industry. From a design practice perspective, both “craft material culture and the local and often tacit knowledge embodied in traditional production processes” are key places for innovation to bridge the past and present and create new meanings (Vacca, Bertola, & Colombi, 2023, p. 350). Vacca, Bertola & Colombi (2023) write from their experience in a research collective at the Design Dept. of Politecnico di Milano in Italy. Brown & Vacca (2022, pp. 595–598) identified four different scenarios through which cultural sustainability can be achieved in the fashion industry:

1. Rethinking craft knowledge: where artisan communities are not only producers but intervene in the design process (e.g., initiatives driven by designers).
2. Crafting disruptive models: working with excluded communities to enhance their cultural capital through artisanal entrepreneurship (e.g., educational programs to transfer knowledge).
3. Decoding craft roots: involves recovering production processes forgotten or with limited generational knowledge transfer to offer renewed authenticity (e.g., initiatives opposing industrial standardization of production).
4. Influencing craft culture: it aims to give visibility to the local culture through an editorial and curatorial design that transmits the specificities that constitute heritage (e.g., physical and virtual spaces to showcase).

Smith et al. (2022) discuss the concept of “regenerative local wool economies”, from the experience of two local wool production projects in Norway and Poland. Regenerative practices refer to a rising trend of “acknowledging how particular human-non-human relations and the biophysical dynamics of the Earth itself” can have tangible (and potentially regenerative) effects on the living landscape (Smith et al., 2022, p. 155). The authors identified how local entrepreneurs are not moved by maximizing profits but by other base motivations such as decreasing dependence on globalized production chains and recovering lost artisanal traditions (Smith et al., 2022, p. 159).

Despite their motivations, initiatives in local wool economies often face challenging trade-offs to remain viable, such as the necessity of raising prices to cover increased costs, thereby potentially reducing accessibility for consumers (Smith et al., 2022, p. 159). Local wool entrepreneurs are usually associated with producing “specialized and luxury products for global markets” that raise questions on accessibility and social justice due to the higher prices of the products (Smith et al., 2022, p. 157). As a response to these challenges, the authors highlight the importance of communicating the values and narratives behind the products, and the importance of the design of the products to make them “durable and adjusted to the climate” as well as attractive to wear (Smith et al., 2022, pp. 159–160).

This section presented both efforts to revitalize textile traditions in Indigenous communities as well as reflexive (re)localizing processes observed in Norway and Poland to reclaim traditional artisan knowledge. A decolonial approach to fashion design sheds light on the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Peru and Norway, emphasizing their efforts to revitalize traditional textiles that are crucial to identity construction and cultural sustainability. Regarding local wool economies, it is important to remember that shifting production and consumption to the global North does not address the “inherited injustices between the global North and South” (Smith et al., 2022, pp. 161-162). Smith et al. (2022, pp. 161-162) conclude that there is a need to challenge colonial legacies and land-grabbing through building alliances between the global North and South.

Slow fashion practices for cultural sustainability and traditional wool textiles are the theoretical framework to study alpaca garments in the Central Andean region. As

suggested by Smith et al. (2022, pp. 162-163), focusing on all the “non-monetary benefits and values” that slow fashion practices reproduce can help to increase visibility and support, both political and economic, to those who “who against all odds are doing the hard work of reconfiguring the textile systems from within the place and living landscapes they are part of”. The following section examines how social enterprises within a solidarity economy balance economic activities with the pursuit of social goals.

3.3. Solidarity economy practices and social enterprises

In a solidarity economy, associations transcend the “sole logic of the market” by prioritizing collective well-being over individual gain (Caillé, 2003). Likewise, the rationale behind social enterprises is rooted not in market logic but in principles of cooperation, reciprocity, solidarity, and mutual commitment among their members (Giovannini & Nachar-Calderón, 2019, pp. 116–117; Nyssens et al., 2019, p. 12). Their social mission, cooperative organization of work, and the equitable distribution of surpluses challenge the formalist conception of economy according to which “... only the market can ensure effective coordination between subjectively rational actors” (Caillé, 2003, pp. 220-221; Gaiger & Wanderley, 2019, p. 241). This section explores social enterprises as part of solidarity economy initiatives in the context of Latin America.

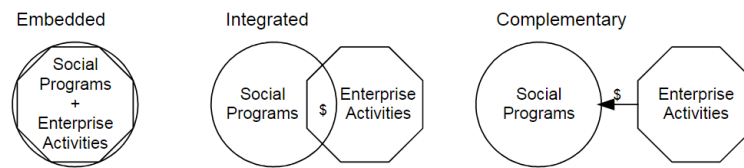
The solidarity economy is diverse, including a wide range of organizations from local cooperatives and exchange systems to global ethical trade networks (Caillé, 2003, pp. 218-219). Caillé (2003, pp. 217-218) argues that solidarity does not oppose material prosperity or profitability; instead, it emphasizes the “capacity to subordinate individual interests to a common one”. He defines the solidarity economy in contrast to three key concepts: utilitarian individualism, the Marxist vision of a planned economy and authoritarian state, and the Anglo-Saxon idea of the third sector as non-profit (Caillé, 2003, pp. 216-218). In summary, the solidarity economy offers an alternative framework that prioritizes collective well-being and challenges traditional economic paradigms.

Latin American social enterprises are closely tied to the solidarity and popular economies, considering the context of insufficient systems of social protection in the region (Nyssens et al., 2019, p. 12). The concept of the popular economy emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to salaried work and a reinterpretation of the informal sector, where solidarity bonds emerged to cooperate among people who had scarce resources (Nyssens et al., 2019, pp. 9–12). Critics, however, caution that the solidarity economy might allow capitalism to address social issues at a low cost (Caillé, 2003, p. 215). Weak governance structures and deep inequalities in Latin America fostered the growth of traditional mutual assistance practices, leading to the development of institutionalized associations and cooperatives that now serve as the historical foundation of the region's solidarity economy.

Social enterprises have a hybrid nature to create both “social and economic value” (Alter, 2003, pp. 7–8). Social enterprises “combine an entrepreneurial dynamic to provide services or goods with the primacy of their social aims” (Nyssens, Wanderley, & Gaiger, 2019, p. 1). They lie between different economic sectors, traditional NGOs, public organizations, and private companies (Doherty et al., 2014). Social enterprises can take various legal forms including cooperatives, limited liability companies, foundations or artisans’ associations. The resources can come from “trading activities, from public subsidies or voluntary contributions” (Nyssens et al., 2019, p. 16).

The concept of social enterprise encompasses a variety of organizations which use business approaches to achieve social objectives (Alter, 2003, p. 8). Based on their operational model, they can be categorized (see Figure 1) according to the following: embedded (e.g. community-based enterprises), integrated (use the income to subsidize social programs or the organization, such as a women's organization that provides childcare services), and complementary (only generates income, such as museum stores) (Alter, 2003, p. 12). An example of an embedded social enterprise is a craft marketing cooperative which buys products at a fair price and sells them in the market, using the profit to pay for the operation costs and support artisans for product development (Alter, 2003, p. 18).

Figure 1. Categories of social enterprises.



*From the left, mission-centric, mission-related, and unrelated to the mission

Source: (Alter, 2003, p. 15)

The EMES International Research Network defined the ideal characteristics of social enterprises according to their economic, social and governance dimensions (Borzaga & Defourny, 2001). From an economic perspective, social enterprises continuously produce goods or provide a service, while the financial viability and risk rely on the members and workers. The social aspect includes the intention to contribute to the well-being of the community through a collective effort. Eventually from a governance dimension perspective, social enterprises favor participatory management, autonomy to implement projects apart from political agendas, and decision-making based on membership, not ownership (Nyssens et al., 2019, pp. 16–17).

Social enterprises face financial challenges beyond those of traditional startups (Gupta, Chauhan, Paul, & Jaiswal, 2020, pp. 220–221). Social enterprises put “social change above private wealth creation” while getting revenue from trading activities to sustain their operations (Doherty et al., 2014, pp. 420–421). This choice adds financial constraints since a slower return rate is expected in exchange for social value creation (Doherty et al., 2014, pp. 424–425). As a response, many social enterprises may opt for “mixed income” portfolios, including grants and donations besides commercial sources (Doherty et al., 2014, p. 430).

The solidarity economy and social enterprises represent diverse alternatives from traditional economic models by prioritizing collective well-being, social aims, and cooperative practices over individual profit. Rooted in the context of Latin America, where weak governance and deep inequalities have historically allowed mutual aid practices to flourish, these enterprises provide a viable alternative framework that challenges the market-driven logic. Despite the financial challenges they face, social

enterprises remain committed to their dual mission of creating both social and economic value, utilizing a variety of operational models and income sources to sustain their impact. Particularly, the business model of social enterprises aims at a social mission which is value-driven rather than cost-driven. The next section describes how sustainable business models can offer alternative narratives on value creation to pursue slow fashion practices.

3.4. Slow fashion practices: integrating a plurality of values in sustainable business models

A business model defines how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value for its customers and other stakeholders in the production chain. But what sets sustainable business models apart? These models integrate social and environmental values into their core, extending beyond the traditional focus on profit maximization. Similarly, the slow fashion approach embodies diverse business models that are not only profitable but also committed to “conserving and enhancing ecological and social systems” (Cataldi, Dickson & Grover, 2013, p. 23). This section delves into the range of values embraced by sustainable business models, particularly within the slow fashion framework. It concludes by introducing the Business Model Canvas as a practical tool for comparing and identifying innovative opportunities for organizations dedicated to slow fashion practices.

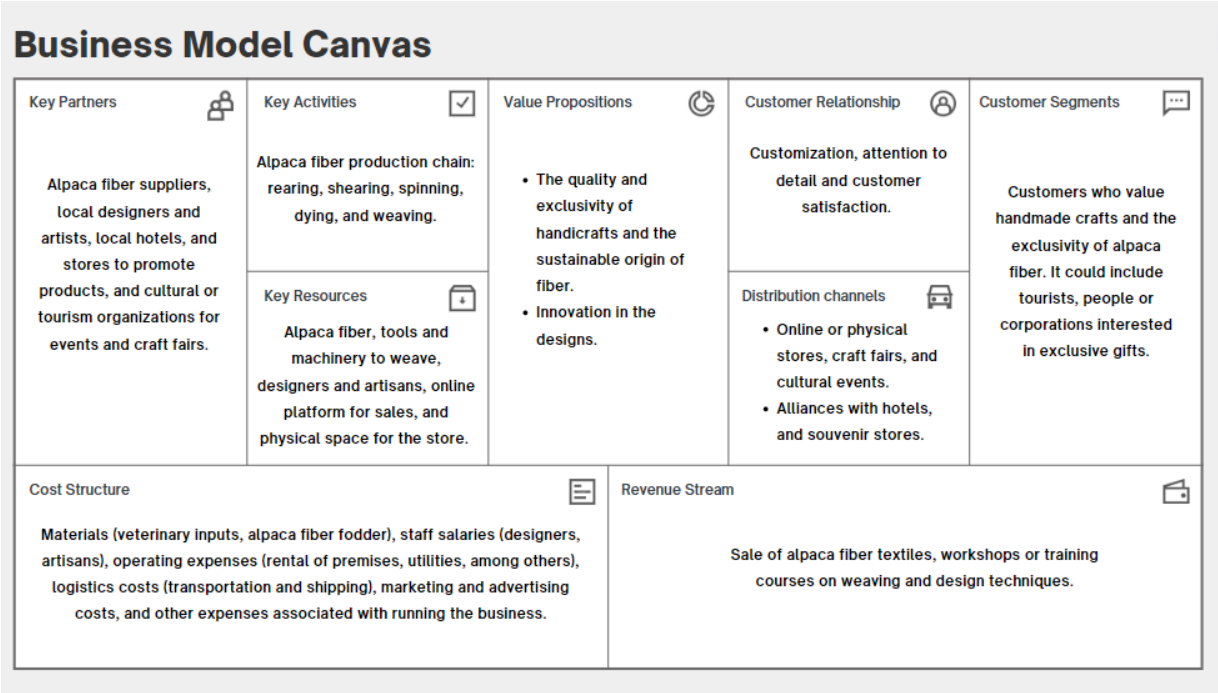
Sustainable business models extend beyond cost-driven principles to embrace a plurality of values, including a strong social mission and a life cycle perspective. A business model defines "how an organization operates" and reflects a company's “core logic and strategic choices to create and capture value within a value network” (Kozlowski, Searcy, & Bardecki, 2018, p. 196; Shafer, Smith, & Linder, 2005, p. 202). While mainstream economics typically defines value in terms of "exchange value" between producers and consumers (Sparviero, 2019, p. 235), social enterprises are characterized by their "mission-focused and impact-driven" approach (Qastharin, 2015). A sustainable business model challenges the traditional "value creation logic" of organizations, encouraging them to move beyond narrow, profit-maximizing frameworks (Schaltegger et al., 2016, p. 5).

Sustainable business models reflect a company's rationale to achieve economic objectives while incorporating a sustainable value proposition (Nosratabadi et al., 2019, pp. 22–24). According to Schaltegger et al. (2016, p. 6), these models "create value for the entire spectrum of stakeholders and the natural environment, extending beyond just customers and shareholders". Sustainable business models offer a holistic approach that aligns economic success with broader social and environmental responsibilities.

In the fashion industry, sustainable business models and consumer engagement are crucial for driving positive change. Designers are encouraged to explore innovative ways to deliver value to consumers that also promote sustainability and circularity (Kozlowski et al., 2018). Slow fashion initiatives, in particular, emphasize the creation of high-quality products, often at a higher price, which encourages consumers to value their purchases more and extend the lifespan of their garments (Jung & Jin, 2014, pp. 3-4). Core values such as equity (fair compensation), authenticity (artisanal textiles and processes), functionality (longevity and versatility), localism, and exclusivity (stemming from small-scale, manual production) shape consumer perceptions and drive their choices toward slow fashion (Jung & Jin, 2014, pp. 5-6). Overall, the slow fashion approach prioritizes high-quality design and production, with a focus on the garment-making process's relationship to both human and natural resources (Cataldi, Dickson & Grover, 2013).

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is a practical tool for innovation that visually maps out the main elements of a business model. Introduced by Osterwalder and Pigneur in 2010, the BMC serves as both an analytical framework for driving innovation and a comparative tool for evaluating different enterprises (Sparviero, 2019). The traditional BMC outlines key components such as key partners, activities, resources, value proposition, customer relationships, channels, customer segments, cost structure, and revenue streams (Qastharin, 2015). For instance, Figure 2 summarizes a business model designed for Aymara women entrepreneurs in Chile who produce alpaca garments (Barra Novoa, 2023).

Figure 2. Business model canvas for alpaca garments



Source: self-elaboration from Barra Novoa (2023).

The traditional Business Model Canvas (BMC) has been adapted in literature to accommodate the unique needs of sustainable and social enterprises. For example, in the social enterprise context, the BMC is expanded to include the organization’s social mission and the potential for co-creating value with beneficiaries (Qastharin, 2015, pp. 7–8). Similarly, Sparviero (2019) introduced a Social Enterprise Model Canvas that incorporates elements such as governance and a social value proposition (Sparviero, 2019, pp. 245–248). For sustainable business models, Joyce & Paquin (2016) developed a triple-layered canvas that integrates social and environmental considerations alongside the traditional economic layer, drawing on life cycle and stakeholder management approaches. In the social layer, their BMC emphasizes social value, employee engagement, governance, and community involvement, while the environmental layer addresses materials, production processes, supply chains, distribution, usage, and end-of-life impacts. Together, these adaptations provide a more holistic framework for sustainable business models.

This chapter examines the diverse values integrated into sustainable business models within the slow fashion framework. It highlights how solidarity economy and

slow fashion practices shift the emphasis from merely fulfilling "market wants" to addressing human needs (Cataldi, Dickson & Grover, 2013, p. 37). Social enterprises within the solidarity economy prioritize collective well-being over individual profit, while slow fashion practices advocate for values such as localism and equity. These perspectives are particularly relevant for studying alpaca garment social enterprises in the Central Andean region. The Business Model Canvas (BMC) is introduced as a valuable tool for visualizing, innovating, and comparing these business models, helping to identify opportunities (Sparviero, 2019). Chapter 5 describes the methodology used in this thesis to map social enterprises involved in alpaca textile production in the Central Andean region, and to compare their business models to uncover innovative practices that contribute to the slow fashion movement.

4. Methodology: qualitative multiple-case study

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore participants' perspectives and interpretations of their social realities (Bryman, 2012, pp. 380-381). The research design is comparative through a multiple-case study (Bryman, 2012, p. 74). Utilizing a comparative design allows it to provide theoretical reflections from contrasting findings (Bryman, 2012, pp. 74-75). The methodology involves qualitative interviewing and the analysis of documents. It incorporates secondary data from scientific literature and reports, as well as primary data collected through semi-structured interviews. The main research question is: How do local artisanal wool practices contribute to sustainable value propositions? Table 1 describes the objectives, secondary research questions, and methods for data collection.

Table 1. Research questions and methods for data collection.

| <i>Objectives</i> | <i>Secondary research questions</i> | <i>Methods</i> |
|--|---|---|
| 1.1. To map social enterprises working with alpaca fiber textiles in the Central Andean region through purposive sampling. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are some examples of alpaca garment social enterprises in the Central Andes? - How have these initiatives evolved over time, and what challenges have they encountered? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secondary data: scientific literature and reports - Case studies through purposive sampling - Semi-structured interviews: key informants |
| 1.2. To compare the business model of social enterprises. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do the business models of these social enterprises crafting alpaca garments contribute to community development and economic empowerment? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collect publicly disclosed background information about the companies (website and social networks). - Semi-structured interviews with representatives from social enterprises |

Source: self-elaboration.

One critique of the multiple-case study research design is that it may overly emphasize the contrasts between cases, potentially neglecting the unique context of each case and overlooking factors beyond the initially considered theoretical

categories (Bryman, 2012, p. 75). To address this issue, secondary data will be utilized to provide a detailed explanation of the regional context, highlighting national differences in alpaca production across the Central Andean region, including Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. Documents included reports provided by social enterprises and international cooperation, as well as other publicly available statistics from governments and international organizations. Most of the information was qualitative data, except for statistics on the trade of alpaca fiber. Despite its limitations, the multiple-case study approach remains valuable for theory building by offering insights through the comparison of findings (Bryman, 2012, p. 75).

This research includes exploratory semi-structured interviews with seven (7) key informants and semi-structured interviews with eleven (11) alpaca garments social entrepreneurs from the Andean region between December 2023 and May 2024. The interviews to key informants were suitable due to the exploratory nature of this dissertation and the experienced character of the people approached (Akhter, 2022). The seven key informants include academics, practitioners from associations of the private sector, NGOs, and international organizations, as well as entrepreneurs commercializing alpaca textiles from the Andean region in Northern European countries. The eleven social entrepreneurs are part of alpaca garment associations in the Central Andean region, Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. The interviews lasted on average 40 minutes, they were carried out online by videoconference, both in Spanish and English, and then transcribed by the author. One semi-structured interview was carried out by email (asynchronous) to a social entrepreneur commercializing alpaca textile in Northern European countries.

Online interviews present challenges, including limitations on personal interactions and reliance on stable internet connections and access to technological equipment (Bryman, 2012, pp. 666-669). These factors can sometimes hinder rapport with interviewees. In some cases, limited connectivity necessitated conducting interviews via WhatsApp calls, and coordinating synchronous video calls across different time zones proved difficult. However, the online format also offered significant advantages, enabling interviews with participants in eight different countries which would have been logistically and financially unfeasible in person. Conducting interviews in both Spanish and English allowed for more fluid conversations, while the

use of webcams improved interaction. Additionally, an asynchronous email interview offered the participant the flexibility to respond at their convenience and review the answers. While most interviews took place in the offices of the organizations, some were conducted in the homes of entrepreneurs, which required a "considerable commitment" from them to stay engaged throughout the interview process. Reflecting on the online character of the research allows identifying the advantages, challenges, and mitigation measures applied to incorporate diverse and meaningful insights from the eighteen (18) participants interviewed.

The research was done following a non-probability purposive sampling of artisanal social enterprises of alpaca garments in the Central Andes, and other key informants working with the private sector, civil society organizations, international cooperation and academia. The intention was to sample participants in a “strategic way” responding to the country of operation, type of social enterprise and organizational background (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). Table 3 summarizes the profiles of the 18 interviewees. Data saturation guided the sample size (Bryman, 2012, pp. 425–427). The sample included eight (8) different social enterprises working with artisanal alpaca fiber textiles in the Central Andean region, including Ecuador (3), Peru (3) and Chile (2). Additionally, two (2) entrepreneurs selling alpaca fiber textiles from the Andes in Europe and one (1) textile social enterprise in Greece were identified as key informants.

Table 2. Profile of the interviewees.

| # | Organization | Gender | Role | Country | Type of organization | Type of interview |
|---|---------------------|--------|----------------------------------|---------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | Paqocha | Male | Owner | Ecuador | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 2 | Paqocha | Female | Owner | Ecuador | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 3 | Artesanías de Chile | Female | Former director | Chile | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 4 | Mosqoy | Female | Community relations facilitation | Peru | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 5 | Mosqoy | Female | Manager of the textiles program | Peru | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |

| | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|--------|---|-------------|----------------------------|--|
| 6 | Tejemujeres | Male | General Manager | Ecuador | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 7 | GIZ | Male | Internal Advisor | Ecuador | International cooperation | Exploratory semi-structured interview |
| 8 | Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona | Female | PhD student | Spain | Academia | Exploratory semi-structured interview |
| 9 | Fashion Revolution/ SOFFA | Female | HR & Project Manager | Greece | NGO | Exploratory semi-structured interview |
| 10 | Sociedad Nacional de Industrias | Male | Manager textile program | Peru | Private sector association | Exploratory semi-structured interview |
| 11 | Descosur | Female | Coordinator of the project "Women of water" | Peru | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 12 | Descosur/ Tejiendo con amor | Female | Specialist in crafts and entrepreneurship | Peru | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 13 | KUN | Female | Social entrepreneur | Ecuador | Social entrepreneur | Exploratory semi-structured interview |
| 14 | Asociación de Artesanía Suri Paqocha | Female | Former president of the association | Peru | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 15 | Cooperativa Aymar Sawuri | Female | Secretary | Chile | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 16 | Lunita Halsdukar med alpackauil | Female | Owner | Sweden | Social entrepreneur | Exploratory semi-structured interview |
| 17 | Coproagrocan | Male | President cooperative | Ecuador | Social enterprise | Semi-structured interview |
| 18 | Alpaca Loca | Female | Owner | Netherlands | Social entrepreneur | Exploratory semi-structured interview by email |

Source: self-elaboration.

The primary data collected was analyzed using thematic analysis with the assistance of Atlas.ti software. The objective was to identify patterns by coding the interview transcripts. Codes were derived from both theoretical frameworks and "recurring motifs" found within the data itself (Bryman, 2012, p. 579). These codes were organized into central themes and subthemes that revealed relationships, differences, and similarities. Four key groups of codes emerged: those exploring the origin and motivation of organizations and entrepreneurs, those addressing structural challenges and the difficulties in garment commercialization, those related to the elements of the Business Model Canvas (BMC), and those concerning the diverse values created by social enterprises according to the slow fashion approach. Chapter 6 presents the findings of this dissertation, including an introduction to artisanal alpaca fiber textiles in the Central Andean region and an exploration of the plurality of values promoted by social enterprises, emphasizing both artisanal craftsmanship and material diversity.

5. Results: crafting sustainability with alpacas and artisanal weaving

The chapter introduces alpaca fiber production in the Central Andean region and its relevance for Andean herders and artisanal weavers. It describes the regional distribution of alpacas in Peru, Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador, as well as the prices paid for the fiber to rural communities. The focus then shifts to the business models of the eight mapped social enterprises in the Central Andes, with an emphasis on their value propositions and relationships with local producers. The chapter further explores the artisanal aspects of alpaca garment production, covering the rearing, spinning, and weaving processes. Finally, it examines alpaca fiber textiles as luxury items that can contribute to pursuing material diversity in a global context dominated by polyester and cotton. This chapter concludes that both artisanal work and material diversity are key conceptual elements of “slow fashion” practices embraced by alpaca garment social enterprises in the Andean region.

5.1. Alpaca fiber in a nutshell: from places to textures

The creation of alpaca garments is deeply connected to the Central Andean region of South America. The journey of alpaca garments begins with fiber procurement in the highlands of Ecuador, Peru, Chile and Bolivia. The process starts with fiber procurement in the highlands and includes stages like spinning, yarn dyeing, and knitting or weaving. This results section gives an overview from places to textures of alpacas, their unique fiber qualities, and the Andean herders who rear and shear them. The emphasis is on the connection between the land, the animals, and the skilled artisans who maintain these traditional practices, resulting in unique alpaca textiles.

Where does alpaca fiber come from? Alpacas are South American camelids bred in the Andean highlands of Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, northern Chile, and northwestern Argentina (Bartl, Mogrovejo, Dueñas, & Quispe, 2023, p. 2). They resulted from the domestication of wild vicuñas and to some extent, interbreeding with guanacos and llamas (Díaz-Maroto et al., 2021, p. 2). Fossil records show alpacas and llamas have been around 7,000 years before the present in the Central Andes (Díaz-

Maroto et al., 2021, p. 2). There are two types of alpaca commonly recognized, the Huacaya, and the Suri. Today, approximately 80% of the global alpaca population is concentrated in Peru (71.7%) and Bolivia (8.6%), with Peru serving as the world's primary exporter of alpaca fiber (Bartl et al., 2023, p. 2). Lately, due to their fine-quality fiber, alpacas have also been introduced abroad in Australia and the US (Bartl et al., 2023, p. 2).

Alpacas play a crucial role in supporting the livelihoods of Andean indigenous and local communities by offering a diverse array of resources. The camelids can provide leather, fiber, manure and meat. Notably, alpacas are valued for producing high-quality fiber, which research suggests possesses superior insulation properties compared to sheep wool (Bartl et al., 2023, p. 2). The alpaca fiber diameter goes from 13,5 to 36 microns. Both quality and color determine the market price of the fiber. In the pre-colonial era, domesticated camelids, including alpacas and llamas held significant economic and cultural importance in the Tawantinsuyu (Germana Cavero et al., 2016, p. 17). However, with the arrival of European colonizers, alpacas and their herders were displaced to less hospitable regions at higher altitudes, where other introduced European species such as cows and sheep struggled to thrive (Germana Cavero et al., 2016, p. 18).

The fiber procurement includes feeding, breeding and shearing of alpacas, typically done once a year for adult ones (FAO, 1996). Alpacas are generally bred in pastoral systems where natural grasslands serve as their primary source of fodder (Bartl et al., 2023, p. 2). Most of the alpacas are in the hands of small producers that rely on family systems and communal natural pastures (FAO, 1996, p. iv). In total, there are more than one million herders of South American camelids who are usually located in remote, high-altitude regions ranging from 3,500 to 4,800 meters above sea level, often facing economic challenges (Germana Cavero et al., 2016, pp. 15–16).

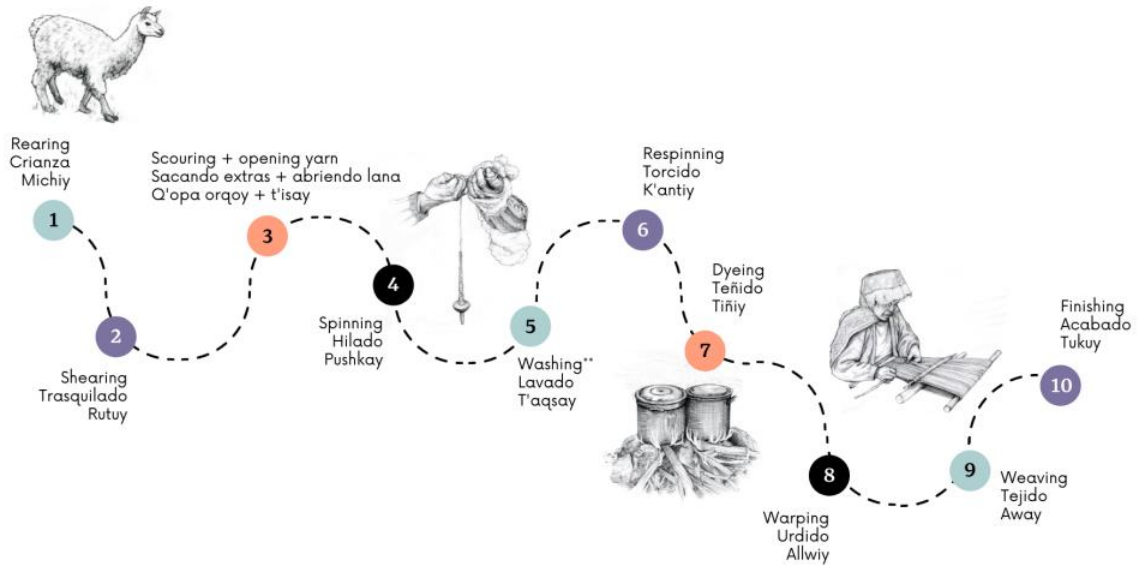
Alpaca herders encounter numerous obstacles when attempting to commercialize their fiber. Those include geographical remoteness from production hubs, a dearth of formalized markets, limited access to information, fair contractual arrangements, and financial credit opportunities (Germana Cavero et al., 2016, p. 22; Moya & Torres, 2008, p. 24). The market price of the fiber is determined by its quality and color (Quispe, Rodríguez, Íñiguez, & Mueller, 2009, p. 5; Wurzinger & Gutiérrez,

2022). Alpacas have 23 different fiber colors (Quispe et al., 2009, p. 5). Despite that, there is a process of "whitening" alpaca fiber because of the textile industry's demand, driven by the preference for fibers that readily accept dyes, commanding higher prices in the market (Enríquez Salas, 2008, pp. 369–370). Fiber quality depends on several external and genetic factors, particularly the weather and feeding conditions (Goycochea Porras, 2021). Recently, reports of climate change and extreme weather conditions in the Andes have increased the mortality of baby alpacas and diminished their access to food (Chauvin, 2022; Liberman, 2021).

The subsequent phases in the alpaca fiber production chain encompass spinning, dyeing, and weaving, each executed through a blend of industrial techniques and manual artisanal craftsmanship (Díaz-Maroto et al., 2021). After shredding, the alpaca fiber is classified according to color and quality (Quispe et al., 2009, p. 5). This process is generally done manually through rapid visual and tactile inspections. After that, a cleaning stage takes place to separate the fiber from impurities followed by spinning (Díaz-Maroto et al., 2021, pp. 153–156). The dyeing process could include natural dyes or synthetic ones (Tavera, 1989, pp. 15–20). Ultimately, the knitting or weaving phase unfolds, often featuring the skilled handiwork of traditional artisans.

Traditional Quechua weaving reflects the cultural heritage, skills and knowledge of artisans in the Andean highlands. Akins (2022, p. 107) created an illustration depicting the 10 key steps of Quechua weaving in Peru. This diagram serves to introduce the artisanal process involved in crafting alpaca garments, highlighting the traditional techniques and knowledge. The example in Figure 3 traces the transformation of alpaca fiber, from its origins in the Andean highlands, to unique textures found in Quechua textiles.

Figure 3. 10 main steps of Quechua weaving in Peru.



Source: Akins (2022, p. 107). The pencil drawings were hand-drawn by Lydia Beauregard.

The next section provides an in-depth exploration of the fiber procurement landscape in Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and Chile. It examines the geographical distribution of alpacas and details the fiber prices, offering a national perspective on the challenges faced by Andean herders across the Central Andean region. This analysis highlights the regional nuances that shape the alpaca fiber industry, setting the stage for a broader understanding of the socioeconomic factors influencing the herders' livelihoods.

5.2. Alpaca fiber production in the Central Andean region

This section explains the geographical distribution of alpacas and the economic conditions of Andean herders that rear alpacas and commercialize the fiber in Ecuador, Perú, Bolivia and Chile. With around 4.3 million alpacas in the country, Peru is the top producer and exporter of alpaca fiber (MINAGRI, 2019, p. 22). In 2018, the country exported a total of €167 million euros in alpaca fiber products destined to 97 countries, mainly China (24%), Italy (19%) and the US (16%) (MINAGRI, 2019, pp. 33–34).

Alpacas are mainly present in the departments of Puno, Cusco and Arequipa (MINAGRI, 2019, p. 25). Alpacas are usually managed by small producers (85%) with 50-100 alpacas (Moya & Torres, 2008, p. 19). In a study conducted by Germana et al. (2016, p. 102), it was found that alpaca herders earn, only from fiber sales, approximately €223,40 euros annually, based on an average herd size of 56 alpacas.

Bolivia is the second biggest producer of Alpaca fiber in the world. There are around 500 thousand alpacas in the country (MINAGRI, 2019, p. 22), distributed in the departments of La Paz, Cochabamba and Potosí (Germana Caverro et al., 2016, p. 322). Alpacas are bred in grasslands and wet meadows, known locally as bofedales (Germana Caverro et al., 2016, pp. 338–339). Herders in the region also grow quinoa to complement their economic livelihoods (Germana Caverro et al., 2016, p. 339). The existence of intermediaries that gather the fiber, and then sell it to the spinning industry limits the capacity of herders to add value (Germana Caverro et al., 2016, p. 358). Producers usually get €2,95/kg for the white fiber and €1,88/kg for the colorful one (Germana Caverro et al., 2016, p. 363). Nevertheless, from fiber to yarn, the value of the product increases by 220% (Germana Caverro et al., 2016, p. 363). Unfortunately, artisanal spinning is challenging since it is not uniform, the informal sector prefers industrial yarn, and small producers cannot reach the international demand for artisanal yarn (Germana Caverro et al., 2016, p. 358).

Chile is the third producer of alpaca fiber in South America (MINAGRI, 2019, p. 22), with 0.6% of the Alpacas worldwide. There are around 16.707 thousand alpacas in Chile (INE, 2022). In Northern Chile, Aymara indigenous communities still carry out traditional marking rituals, known as “floreo” which aim to count and reaffirm family property (Mamani, 2018, pp. 78–86). There are very few alpacas in Argentina; however, due to their presence in contiguous environments, Chile and Bolivia, they might be counted as llamas (Mueller et al., 2015, p. 98).

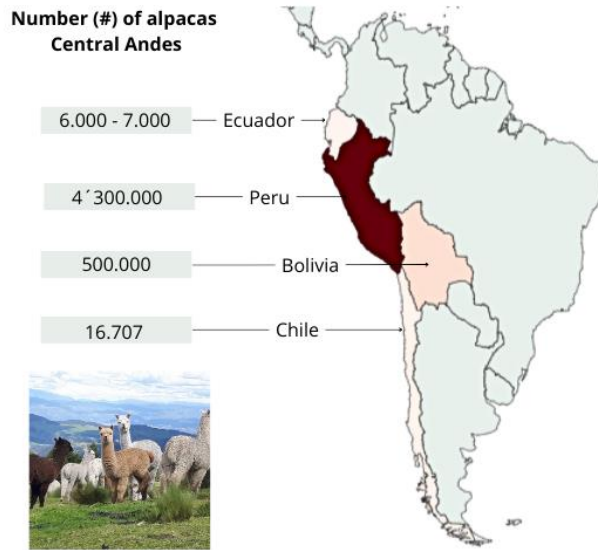
In Ecuador, alpacas have been promoted as a livelihood opportunity for communities living in the “páramos”, fragile ecosystems in the Andes Mountain Range (Segovia, Gortaire, & Segovia, 2022; White & Bienert, 2021). In Ecuador, there is evidence of camelids 5.000 years BC, particularly in pre-Columbian civilizations such as the “Cañaris” and “Puruhás” (Segovia et al., 2022, p. 17). In this country, South American camelids almost disappeared and were re-introduced in the '80s and '90s

from Peru, Bolivia and Chile (Segovia et al., 2022, pp. 12–13). Alpacas in Ecuador are mainly present in the provinces of Pichincha, Cotopaxi, Bolívar, Chimborazo and Cañar (White & Bienert, 2021, p. 6). The whole population is estimated to be between 6.000 - 7.000 alpacas (White & Bienert, 2021, p. 6). These alpacas are primarily managed by community associations (80%) and a smaller fraction by private breeders (20%) (Segovia et al., 2022). A study conducted in Chimborazo indicated that the price of alpaca fiber per kilogram could vary around €3,26/kg, with each alpaca yielding approximately 2 kilograms of fiber annually, contingent upon its quality (Segovia et al., 2022, p. 28).

Peru is the leading producer and exporter of alpaca fiber, with approximately 4.3 million alpacas. Most alpacas in Peru are managed by small producers in Puno, Cusco, and Arequipa. In contrast, Bolivia, the second-largest producer, has around 500,000 alpacas primarily in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Potosí, where herders also cultivate quinoa. Chile, the third-largest producer, has about 16.707 alpacas, particularly connected with indigenous Aymara communities. In Ecuador, where alpacas were reintroduced in the 1980s, there are an estimated 6.000 - 7.000 alpacas, mainly managed by community associations in the provinces of Pichincha, Cotopaxi, Bolívar, Chimborazo, and Cañar. The varying regional dynamics reflect the diverse challenges and opportunities in alpaca production across the Central Andean region.

In summary, Peru stands as the leading producer and exporter of alpaca fiber, with an estimated 4.3 million alpacas, mostly managed by small-scale producers in the regions of Puno, Cusco, and Arequipa. Bolivia, the second-largest producer, has approximately 500,000 alpacas, primarily concentrated in La Paz, Cochabamba, and Potosí, where herders often also cultivate quinoa. Chile, the third-largest producer, has around 16,707 alpacas, predominantly associated with indigenous Aymara communities. In Ecuador, where alpacas were reintroduced in the 1980s, there are an estimated 6,000 to 7,000 alpacas, primarily managed by community associations in the provinces of Pichincha, Cotopaxi, Bolívar, Chimborazo, and Cañar. These regional variations highlight the distinct challenges and opportunities in alpaca production across the Central Andean region (see Figure 4 for an overview).

Figure 4. Distribution of alpacas in the Central Andes.



Source: self-elaboration, alpaca photo taken from the social media of Paqocha.

The upcoming chapters (6.3-6.7) shift the focus to the voices of the participants interviewed, providing insights from the field that trace the journey of alpaca garments from fiber to its commercialization. Chapter 6.3 delves into business models and organizational structures, while the subsequent sections explore the artisanal processes and traditional knowledge of Andean herders, spinners, and weavers. Overall, the stories shared confirm the plurality of values of the social enterprises involved in alpaca garment production.

5.3. Mapping social enterprises: “A garment that warms you and carries a story” (I1, 2024)

The first objective of this dissertation is to identify social enterprises commercializing alpaca fiber textiles in the Andean Region. The mapping exercise led to identifying and contacting 8 different initiatives in Ecuador, Peru and Chile. The organizations involved shared their experiences in commercializing the products as well as the stories behind the garments. This section introduces the different

organizations and their business models. Table 3 includes a detailed description of each social enterprise studied in this dissertation.

Table 3. Comparative table of the business model from the social enterprises interviewed.

| <i>Name/year</i> | <i>Short description</i> | <i>Country</i> | <i>Sales Channels</i> | <i>Values</i> |
|---|---|--------------------|--|--|
| Paqocha (alpaca Kichwa) in Family company-network Year: 2005 | It is a small family-owned company, benefiting 100 families across the production chain. It focuses on artisanal spinning and weaving primarily carried out by women. The organization maintains a direct connection with alpaca-rearing communities. | Ecuador Pichincha | One physical store, craft markets, selling through other stores with their own brand. | - Atemporal design - Conservation and community engagement - Emotional work through artisanal techniques |
| Tejemujeres Cooperative Year: 1992 | Cooperative, with 32 women directly associated while other 120-130 female weavers are involved during the production chain. It buys wool from other communities. Currently, they pilot artisanal spinning of alpaca wool. | Ecuador Azuay | Social media (Instagram and WhatsApp). Future plans of a physical store. The organization sells to intermediaries that export the product. | - Social justice and women empowerment. - Cooperativism. |
| Cooproagrocan Cooperative Three years old but with 25 years of previous experience from other organizations. | Cooperative with 45 active members. They own 1560 alpacas of 8 natural colors. It is composed of alpaca rearing communities. Around 300 women are involved in the process of artisanal spinning and weaving. The cooperative also sells alpaca meat. | Ecuador Chimborazo | Craft markets and online through social media. | - Ecosystem conservation - Economic alternative to rural communities that face abandonment and migration. |
| Mosqoy NGO 18 years of experience | Peruvian Canadian NGO. It works with textiles, artisanal weaving and alpaca rearing communities, | Peru Cuzco | Sales through other stores, online (Etsy), and craft markets. | - Responsible tourism - Cultural heritage of Andean |

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| | supports youth from rural communities with scholarships to pursue their studies, and tourism on weaving communities. | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support to artisanal production of textiles - Community development |
| Descosur NGO 38 years of experience The program on textiles and crafts started in 2019. | 13 groups of women are involved. The brand is Tejiendo con amor: hilos de altura. This is part of the project: women of water. | Peru Arequipa, Moquegua, Puno | Online through social media, craft markets, and directly to tourists in a natural reserve. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women empowerment and community development - Climate change adaptation |
| Suri Paqocha Association 15 women Year: 2008 | It is composed of Alpaca rearing communities. Female weavers that do artisanal spinning, and natural dyeing. Each woman can have around 100 alpacas. | Peru Puno | Social media, intermediaries in Lima that send to France and Germany. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alpaca rearing communities - Organizational work |
| Aymar Sawuri Cooperative 2017 15 women | Artisanal weavers with knowledge. They buy the fiber or do artisanal spinning with natural dyeing techniques. | Chile Tarapacá | Online (social media and website) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organization work - Aymara cultural heritage - Emotional work behind each garment |
| Artesanías de Chile Foundation (non-profit organization) 2002 The project with alpaca textiles started in 2019 in collaboration with the mining company, Teck Chile. | The project supports artisanal Aymara female weavers. It includes alpaca rearing communities whose fiber is sent to Bolivia for the spinning process. 18 female weavers were directly involved in the production of the collection of both garments and accessories. | Chile Tarapacá | Online and physical stores from the Foundation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowerment female artisans - Revitalization Aymara cultural heritage |

Source: self-elaboration.

Three cooperatives and one association were mapped in Ecuador, Peru and Chile: Tejemujeres, Cooprogrocan, Suri Paqocha, and Aymar Sawuri (see Table 4). Tejemujeres in Ecuador has 32 active “socias” or women members and involves up to

130 female weavers in the production process. The organization was born in the 1990s as an effort to work on rural women empowerment. Cooproagrocan is a newer cooperative but resulting from past efforts for cooperative work involving alpaca rearing communities in the Ecuadorian Andes. The social enterprise has 45 active members including more than 300 women in the artisanal process of spinning the wool and weaving the garments. The last cooperative is Aymar Sawuri in Tarapacá, Chile. It was born in 2017, and currently counts on 15 active female Aymara traditional weavers. Suri Paqocha, a Peruvian association based in Puno, Peru, was born in 2008. It is composed of 15 women, artisanal weavers from traditional alpaca rearing communities. These different organizations share the emphasis on collaborative work through the solidarity bonds between their members and the intention to pursue a commercial purpose.

Table 4. Cooperatives and brands.

| Organization | Brand | Members |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Suri Paqocha (Peru) |  |  |
| Tejemujeres (Ecuador) |  |  |

Aymar Sawuri
(Chile)



Cooproagrocan
(Ecuador)



Source: social media from cooperatives.

Cooperatives and associations allow alpaca rearing communities and artisanal weavers to position a collective brand in the market while empowering members through communal work. Three out of the four cooperatives identified are managed and composed only by women (I6, I14, I15). A founder of one of those cooperatives shared: “I wish an [female] artisan could make a living from their craft and be able to educate her child with what she earns from it...” (I15, 2024).

Besides economic independence, cooperatives share concerns about the traditional weavers, their physical wellbeing, such as occupational injuries and retirement benefits. One of the cooperatives reflected on the role of older members who retired and the importance of ensuring an “active space” for them to contribute with their experience on communitarian work and women's rights (I6, 2024). The collective work inspires a vision of “moving forward” together. The pictures below (Figure 5) show the products offered by the cooperatives.

Figure 5. Alpaca fiber products sold by cooperatives.

Suri Paqocha (Peru)



Venta en línea, accesorios y prendas naturales.
www.artesaniasuripaqocha.com

Tejemujeres (Ecuador)



Aymar Sawuri (Chile)



Coproagrocan (Ecuador)



Source: social media and website from cooperatives.

Another group of organizations includes two NGOs and a foundation in Peru and Chile (see Table 5). Mosqoy, a Peruvian Canadian NGO based in Cusco, has 18 years of experience working with alpaca-rearing communities and traditional Kichwa-speaking weavers. Mosqoy focuses on artisanal textiles, community tourism, and youth education. Descosur, another Peruvian NGO with 38 years of experience, has been working with female weavers and alpaca-rearing communities since 2019. Descosur created the brand “Hilos de Altura: Tejiendo con Amor” (High-Altitude Threads: Weaving with Love) to promote the collective commercialization of alpaca textiles. The third organization is Fundación Artesanías de Chile, a non-profit foundation established in 2002. It recently implemented a project with Aymara alpaca textiles in collaboration with a private company. Both Descosur and Fundación Artesanías de Chile have launched projects to promote the commercialization of alpaca textiles produced by local alpaca-rearing communities and traditional weavers. Meanwhile, Mosqoy is entirely dedicated to selling garments and accessories crafted by these artisans.

Table 5. NGOs and brands.

| Organization | Brand | Artisans |
|------------------|---|--|
| Mosqoy (Peru) |  |  |

Descosur
(Peru)
“Hilos de Altura”



Fundación
Artesanías de
Chile

Fundación
Artesanías
de Chile



Source: social media of NGOs.

NGOs provide financial and technical support to communities. It can include capacity building on product quality and design, marketing, pricing strategy, branding, legal advice and formalization (I3-I5, I11, 2024). Recurrent challenges include the limited organizational capacity of communities which demands efforts toward formalization and team building. One NGO representative highlighted that: “It is like a dream [to me] to make the artisans completely independent, highly organized, and with many opportunities to market their products” (I4, 2024). Nevertheless, the challenges perceived refer to structural issues such as the marginalization of Andean rural communities, limited presence of the State, and in one case the lack of trust on new initiatives after previous failed attempts. NGOs can also facilitate sales channels through physical and online stores, storytelling of the product, and reaching consumers interested in the product. Figure 6 shows a glimpse of the garments and products offered through the NGOs.

Figure 6. Examples of alpaca fiber textiles commercialized through NGOs.

Hilos de Altura / Descosur
(Peru)



Mosqoy
(Peru)



Fundación Artesanías de Chile



Source: photos taken from social media of NGOs and the book “Herederas de Isluga” (Fundación Artesanías de Chile, 2021).

The final organization is Paqocha, a network and family business based in Ecuador. This initiative collaborates with approximately 100 families throughout the production chain, ranging from alpaca-rearing communities to female artisanal spinners and weavers. Paqocha was established in 2005, inspired by the firsthand experiences of a couple dedicated to conservation efforts within a marginalized rural community. The entrepreneur couple had the dream of re-valuing artisanal alpaca fiber to benefit Andean communities rearing the camelids in the country: "It [Paqocha] doesn't start as a company saying, "how cool, let's start a business or a company... let's do something with the fiber", but rather as it can't be possible that [alpaca rearing] communities don't benefit from this" (I2, 2024). The interviewee (I1, 2024) stressed that Paqocha is a network connecting several families in the artisanal production chain. In addition to providing technical support to improve the fiber quality, Paqocha is involved directly in the design of the garments and the marketing for the commercialization of the products. Figure 7 below illustrates an example of a scarf designed and sold by Paqocha.

Figure 7. Example of alpaca scarf commercialized by Paqocha in Ecuador.



Source: social media of Paqocha. The image on the right illustrates the alpaca shearing process and the subsequent classification of the fiber, facilitated by Paqocha.

5.4. Artisanal work: from alpacas to garments

The production chain of alpaca garments encompasses three key stages: the rearing of alpacas by Andean herders, artisanal spinning, and traditional weaving. This dissertation emphasizes the artisanal work involved in weaving alpaca garments, exploring the challenges and opportunities at each stage. Artisanal work is a cornerstone of the “slow fashion” movement, and this dissertation highlights how traditional knowledge, passed down through generations, continues to thrive in the local production of alpaca textiles in the Central Andean region.

5.4.1. Alpaca rearing communities: about conservation, economic opportunities and cultural heritage

This section outlines the situation of alpaca-rearing communities in the Andean highlands, focusing on Ecuador, Peru, and Chile, resulting from the interviews conducted with the alpaca garment social enterprises studied in this dissertation. While Ecuador reintroduced alpacas for conservation purposes, Peru has developed an industrialized production of alpaca fiber. In Ecuador, the challenge lies in revaluing alpaca wool by improving fiber quality and ensuring sufficient volume for textile production. Peruvian alpaca-rearing communities face the challenge of industrialized production and intermediaries that pay low prices for the fiber and reproduce inequalities across the production chain. Lastly, the case of Aymara communities in Chile serves as a reminder of alpacas as cultural elements strongly connected with family and territory. This section focuses on the perspectives of the interviewees from the social enterprises mapped in this dissertation, highlighting their views on the context, challenges, and opportunities they encounter.

In Ecuador, alpacas were introduced by NGOs and international cooperation as part of conservation efforts in the Andean highlands. These camelids were brought in to help reduce the expansion of the agricultural frontier in communities situated above 3.500 meters of altitude (I17, 2024). Alpacas in the country are primarily owned by communities, which means that decisions are made collectively (I13, 2024). Since 2015, Ecuador has implemented a technical standard, INEN 2852, which regulates the classification of alpaca wool based on its quality.

The communal ownership, coupled with a reliance on external assistance, has limited both the quality of the fiber and production volumes, resulting in few opportunities to scale up the production of alpaca textiles in Ecuador (I13, 2024). Consequently, initiatives often last only as long as they receive active technical and financial support (I13, 2024). One entrepreneur shared an anecdote: “On one occasion, we found a room filled with sheared alpaca fiber that was moldy, rotting, and damp with fungus. The alpacas were dying, and the rural communities didn't know why; they felt disconnected from the species...” (I2, 2024). The quality of the fiber is a determining factor in its price; for instance, Paqocha has paid up to 35 US dollars [32,23 EU] per kilogram for high-quality fiber in communities dedicated to quality improvement. Despite the challenges, innovative proposals for the artisanal production of alpaca textiles have emerged, exemplified by projects like Paqocha and Cooprogrocan, which aim to ensure fair prices to alpaca-rearing communities.

As the leading producer of alpaca wool, Peru has industrialized alpaca fiber production, predominantly managed by medium and large enterprises (I10, 2024). The Michell and Inca Groups dominate the alpaca fiber market, accounting for more than half of all exports (Salazar & Cinque, 2023). At that scale of production companies have focused on genetically improving the quality, thickness, and color of the fiber (I10, 2024). Since 2003, Peru has approved 14 technical guidelines aimed at enhancing the quality of alpaca fiber, covering aspects ranging from classification to shearing techniques (Gobierno del Perú, 2022).

Despite the industrial development in Peru, alpaca rearing communities (“comunidades alpaqueras” in Spanish) generally face difficulties to commercialize the fiber at a fair price. One participant shared the experience of a small community, called Cancha Cancha outside Cusco, which struggles to improve the quality of the fiber while the prices they get are unfair: “...the fiber price was 10 soles [2,46 EU] per kilo, 14 soles [3,44 EU] per kilo for an alpaca that they have to feed, raise, and graze for two years before shearing” (I5, 2024). Additionally, the industry prefers buying “white” alpaca, regardless of the richness of diverse colors of the fiber: “one alpaca can have 7 colors” (I14, 2024). Alpacas are generally sheared once a year between December and March (I14, 2024). Communities then classify the fiber to sell it to intermediaries

or produce artisanal yarn, such as the case of projects involved with Mosqoy and Suri Paqocha.

From the interviews with participants from Chile, a great reference was made to alpacas as elements of cultural heritage in Aymara communities. In a book produced by Fundación Artesanías de Chile an artisanal weaver, called Albina Choque, explained: "In the same piece of land where five generations of my family have passed, I have my alpacas. I like to go back there because it reminds me of what I am: my culture, that of my parents, that of my grandparents..." (2021, p. 67). A representative from Aymar Sawuri described how her mother, an artisanal Aymara weaver, migrated to the city with her alpaca, sheep, and llama in search of better educational opportunities for her children (I15, 2024). The stories of alpacas have strong connection to family ties and cultural heritage in Aymara communities in Northern Chile. The following chapter discusses artisanal spinning as the next step in the production chain of alpaca textiles.

5.4.2. Artisanal spinning: "Una fiesta de ovillos" [A yarn party] (I2, 2024)

A representative from Paqocha, an Ecuadorian social enterprise, described it as a "yarn party" when they began engaging with indigenous women who spin alpaca wool using traditional methods: "You see the women arriving, carrying their shawls [chalinás], instead of babies with balls of yarn, and they joyfully receive their payment" (I2, 2024). This section focuses on artisanal spinning as both an opportunity to enhance the value of the fiber and a challenging step in the process of producing alpaca textiles. From the eight organizations interviewed, five reported spinning alpaca wool in an artisanal way. The interviews reveal the limitations of artisanal spinning when compared to industrial production, as well as the cultural and emotional value of this traditional craft.

Alpaca fiber has special properties that make it challenging to process using industrial machines without blending it with other materials such as sheep wool or synthetics (I13, 2024). As a result, industrially produced alpaca yarn cannot be 100% alpaca wool, unlike artisanally crafted ones (I13, 2024). However, spinning alpaca wool

is a time-consuming part of the production of garments, a participant mentioned: “The spinning takes quite a while... we spin about 100 to 150 grams per day” (I14, 2024). For that reason, weaving communities and social enterprises opt to buy the yarn: “Imagine that it takes a month to weave a product. The conversion into yarn takes another month, so it would be a product of 2 months. Therefore, many of them [weaving communities] choose to buy the yarn and transform it” (I5, 2024). Artisanal spinning guarantees a product made entirely of alpaca fiber; however, it is a time-consuming process that is not always valued in the traditional market.

Artisanal spinning is a slow practice not initially oriented to the commercialization of products. A participant reflected on time, how women in rural communities in Ecuador would spin different amounts according to how busy they had been and when they needed the money from selling the yarn: “You arrive at the community and the woman who needs it [financial income] has plenty of yarn. Another woman has a small ball of yarn and says that she was busy because she visited her grandson” (I2, 2024). The participant concluded that the intention of the commercialization of alpaca textiles was not to “disrupt women's lives” (I2, 2024), but rather to offer them economic opportunities respecting their individual choice.

The time-consuming aspect is not the sole challenge; ensuring quality, particularly in terms of uniform color, thickness, and cleanliness, is also difficult. While industrial yarn production can guarantee uniform colors, the diverse range of shades found in alpaca wool makes achieving a single color a complex task (I14, 2024). A participant shared how that obstacle can be transformed into exclusivity: “The truth is, it's all about exclusivity. We have to make five or four garments more or less similar to that one shade” (I14, 2024). Ensuring cleanliness can be perceived as a challenge, artisanal yarn can have the presence of “leaves or straw” (I4, 2024). As a response, a participant from a social enterprise mentioned:

We tell the customer... you can feel happy about the garment you're wearing when you find moss or straw, because it shows that it has traveled from the highlands to your body just as it is, without any chemicals. There's no carbonization, and you can remove the straw, so there's no problem, or leave the moss if you want (I2, 2024).

The final aspect of quality pertains to the thickness of the yarn. Women produce yarn of varying quality based on their experience, preferences, and emotional

investment in the work. These variations can pose a challenge when selling the yarn to producers who expect standardized measurements. An interviewee from a social enterprise (I2, 2024) described their experience as follows:

She was spinning yarn like sewing machine thread, very thin. So, we realized that she couldn't make it thick anymore, and the other one couldn't make it thin, so the young women who were joining... made it thicker, sometimes not so perfect because they were just starting out. And then we said: no, no, we're wrong, we should let the women have the freedom to do what they feel, because it's also an inner work... in the heart, in the mind...

Artisanal spinning is deeply tied with emotional labor and personal connection. One participant noted that the mood and emotional state of the spinners directly influence the quality of the final yarn (I2, 2024). These humane, caring slow practices add a unique value to the process, which, when effectively communicated, can enhance the perceived value of artisanal alpaca garments for customers. The extract below describes the inner work involved in artisanal spinning (I2, 2024).

They themselves say, and I love to hear them: “when we're in a bad mood, we can't get the yarn right. When we're in a good mood, it comes out nicer”. So, it's quite a process of inner work for the woman to concentrate and align herself. So, we said no, we're not going to ask for any thickness from them, but let each one make the thickness they feel comfortable and happy with...

Spinning alpaca wool has a significant heritage value, connecting family ties and cultural traditions. In Ecuador, one participant noted how negative connotations of spinning wool, rooted in colonial times, had persisted (I2, 2024). Spinning wool was a task often imposed on indigenous girls. Additionally, women would spin wool to exchange the yarn for weaving a poncho, receiving an animal or labor in return, but never selling it for monetary value. In the book from Fundación Artesanías de Chile, another female artisan recounted her childhood experiences of accompanying her mother to graze animals every day when she was eight years old. Her mother would spin wool as they walked, often saying, “This way, while the animals eat, you can sit and take the chance to weave” (Fundación Artesanías de Chile, 2021, p. 74).

Despite the values inherent in artisanal spinning, weavers in Ecuador and Chile would often choose to buy yarn from Peru or Bolivia, where industrialization processes

are more advanced (I3, 2024; I16, 2024). For instance, alpaca-rearing communities in Chile choose to sell their fiber to intermediaries and spinning mills in Bolivia, and then repurchase the yarn to weave garments (I3, 2024). The following section moves one step further on the production chain to focus on artisanal weaving of alpaca garments.

5.4.3. Artisanal alpaca garments: “You are living culture” (I15, 2024)

A leader from a traditional weaving cooperative in Chile referred to her fellow “compañeras” as “living culture” (I15, 2024). This last section will focus on the design, weaving techniques and cultural heritage present in artisanal alpaca garments. The weaving stage is the common element present in all 8 organizations. All social enterprises build on the value of artisanal and traditional weaving techniques.

Regarding the design of the garments, organizations reported different degrees of external intervention. On one side is collaborating with fashion designers, followed by a mixed approach of collective design between weavers and those commercializing the products, and a third option based on autonomous choices left to traditional weavers. This aspect is relevant in terms of satisfying customers` preferences and ensuring the commercialization of the products. Collaborations with designers are mediated through financial support from external entities, such as governmental agencies. Aymar Sawuri in Chile described receiving support from a governmental agency to cover the costs of a designer, otherwise it would not be affordable: “We could not pay what they charge for it” (I15, 2024).

Mosqoy on the other hand counts with two collections, one traditional that allows women to freely choose and design traditional products such as “ponchos” and another which focuses on revitalizing the design to connect with the final customer. For example, Mosqoy has provided training in colorimetry, with weavers participating in workshops on color combination and neutralization techniques to make their textiles more appealing to customers (I5, 2024). An example of design revitalization is the transition from the traditional “chuspa” (Andean bag) to Mosqoy`s best seller, the tote bag. Mosqoy maintains a photographic record of products to ensure the continuity of

future collections, given the limited quantities and the challenges of replicating identical items. The organization builds upon the traditional designs to compete in the market:

What we saw that we had, and others did not, was that we maintained the symbols [pallay] that the weavers incorporate into their textiles. If they were to weave something for themselves, they would tell stories with their symbols. So, we decided to stay with that because it is a way to keep alive the culture where they tell stories, and you can see how the symbols change. It's funny because sometimes you ask them, "What does this mean?" and they say, "Oh, this, yes, yes, it's like the head of a fish". It's an oral tradition that is passed down from generation to generation, and it's interesting to have it captured in textiles.

At Paqocha, one of the founders, Lorena, is responsible for designing the products, creating garments that are both timeless and versatile (I2, 2024). In the interview, she shared memories of her childhood and her grandmother, who used to weave. Although Lorena once thought it was a long and boring process, she rediscovered this passion through Paqocha: "I started to open my grandmother's trunk with all her designs, the jackets, the stitches, and I thought, how beautiful, what I criticized throughout my childhood. Then, I did a bit of research to see trends, but not just trends, also thinking about a different approach". In Paqocha, the design is intended to fit different bodies and ages to last through time: "a garment that lasts a lifetime, one that you take to the grave, your alpaca garment" (I2, 2024). Regarding her experience with designers Lorena highlighted the challenges of working with external designers that are not familiarized with artisanal yarn and weaving:

I feel that, in addition to being a designer, one must have a love for this fiber, a love for hand-spun yarn, a love for everything behind it. It's not just about the design; it's about adapting this unique yarn because it's not an industrial yarn where you can see something in a magazine and replicate it exactly. It doesn't turn out the same; you have to understand the yarn, the thickness, it's a process.

Fundación Artesanías de Chile put great efforts to improve the attractiveness of traditional Aymara techniques for contemporary use. Their collection emerged from a collaborative design process involving two female representatives from seven organizations in Isluga, who created the initial samples. The foundation reported that Aymara communities in Isluga continue to use pre-Columbian weaving techniques

such as the four-stake loom and the waist loom, along with foot pedal looms introduced during the Spanish colonial period (Fundación Artesanías de Chile, 2021, pp. 25-36). While traditional looms produce unique garments with higher density and greater durability, foot pedal looms are used to create longer fabrics and lighter garments suited for urban use (Fundación Artesanías de Chile, 2021, pp. 36-37).

Aymar Sawuri employs traditional weaving techniques using various looms, including foot pedal looms and the four-stake loom. On the foot pedal looms, they weave garments such as ponchos, scarves, and shawls. The interviewee shared how her mother, also a traditional Aymara weaver, innovated with the four-stake loom by transitioning from making the traditional "aksu" (female shawl) to creating commercially viable garments. Additionally, they moved from the four-stake loom to the faster foot pedal loom, which has historically been used by men (I15, 2024).

Regarding the different techniques, Tejemujeres reported employing knitting needles, crochet hooks, and traditional looms. In the case of Hilos de Altura, Descosur, reported employing social media to share with the female weaver's colors and trends while planning in the future working with a designer and registering their brand (I12, 2024). At Suri Paqocha, they use the internet to find inspiration for weaving trendy garments. They artisanally spin the yarn and achieve the desired colors through natural dyeing with herbs and plants from the region (I14, 2024).

The previous chapters (6.3 - 6.7) detailed the artisanal processes employed by the eight social enterprises examined in this dissertation. These sections explored the business models of cooperatives, NGOs, and networks involved in the production and commercialization of alpaca garments in the Central Andean region, emphasizing their value propositions and their relationships with Andean herders, spinners, and weavers. Artisanal work emerged as the central element of their business models. The final results chapter (6.8) shifts the focus to alpaca fiber itself, highlighting its potential to enhance material diversity.

5.5. Encouraging material diversity: luxury hair fibers and alpaca wool

“Global fiber production per person has... increased, from 8.3 kilograms per person in 1975 to 14.6 kilograms per person in 2022” (Textile Exchange, 2023).

Synthetic fibers have overruled the market since the 1990s, accounting for 65% of world fiber production in 2022, with polyester alone representing 54%. They are followed by cotton which accounts for 22% (Textile Exchange, 2023, pp. 10–11). Animal fibers represent only 1.6% of the global market, with alpaca wool being 0.01% (Textile Exchange, 2023, pp. 10–11). Alpaca wool is considered a luxury hair fiber, coming just after cashmere and mohair in terms of production volumes (Lakshmanan, Jose, & Chakraborty, 2016, pp. 18–20). Consequently, one alpaca sweater can cost between \$150-\$200 [€137,62 euros - €183,50 euros] (Lakshmanan et al., 2016, pp. 18–20).

Kate Fletcher suggests material diversity so “more resource-efficient and culturally responsive fibers can begin to flourish”. Organic, low-chemical, renewable and biodegradable fibers can reduce the impacts of monoculture and the dependence on oil extraction associated with polyester and cotton (Fletcher, 2014, p. 9). Naturally colored fibers can be an opportunity to take advantage of color variation without bleaching or dyeing the fiber and the impacts connected to coloration (Fletcher, 2014, p. 41).

Fibershed is an “ecologically sensitive community” founded by Rebecca Burges in Northern California and composed of fiber producers and artisans. Fibershed refers to the notion of “watershed” emphasizing locally produced fashion and regenerative agriculture (Langdown, 2014, p. 38). Fibershed works as a movement, with 45 affiliated communities around the globe, and a cooperative as a business entity to commercialize the products (Fibershed, 2024).

Natural fibers could have strong impacts on land and water, while synthetic fibers are highly dependent on oil extraction (Maduna & Patnaik, 2023, p. 29). A cradle-to-grave environmental study of an alpaca fiber sweater produced in Peru revealed that the majority (70%) of the emissions originate from the fiber procurement stage, caused by enteric fermentation resulting from the digesting process of the animal (Bartl et al., 2023). Alpacas in the Andes are fed with natural grasslands, so conservation practices are critical to ensure feed quality (Bartl et al., 2023, p. 7).

Ethical treatment and animal welfare are part of the discussions on sustainable fashion. Criticism regarding the well-being of alpacas during the shearing process has been done by organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). The organization denounced cruelty practices against alpacas in Mallkini, a large privately owned farm in Peru (PETA, 2020). As a response, the Responsible Alpaca Standard (RAS) has been promoted as a voluntary certification scheme that focuses on animal welfare protection, land conservation, and social protection (Textile Exchange, 2021). In 2019, Peru released a national technical norm on alpaca shearing that among others, approaches animal welfare (MIDAGRI, 2021). High standards of animal welfare can help to minimize ecological impacts and the international image of this economic sector (Planntin, 2016).

Alpaca wool, a high quality and sustainable material, presents an opportunity to develop slow fashion practices in local landscapes. Kate Fletcher, part of the slow fashion movement, advocates for material diversity through organic and biodegradable fibers that can serve as an alternative to reduce the environmental impact of polyester and cotton. Experiences like Fibershed in the US show the potential of organized efforts towards locally produced and ecologically sounded fashion.

Alpaca wool production faces significant challenges, such as emissions from fiber procurement and concerns about animal welfare during shearing. These issues underscore the ecological challenges inherent in industrial alpaca textile production. Local practices in alpaca garment production must address these challenges to avoid replicating the contradictions of industrial production: while alpaca wool may be marketed as luxurious, its sustainability is questioned.

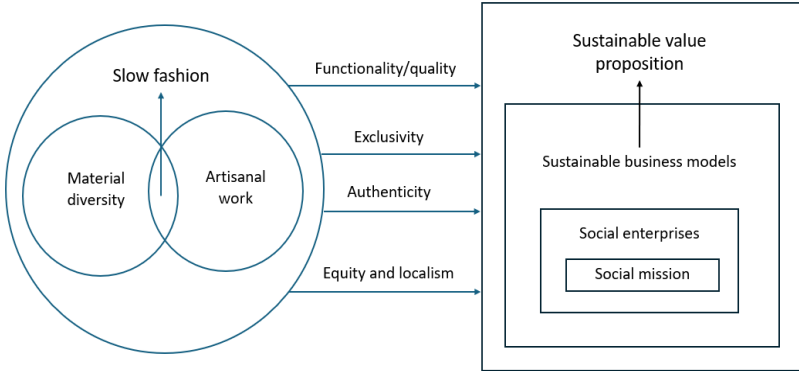
Overall, alpacas present a significant opportunity to address the conservation of highland ecosystems. When alpaca production aligns with traditional, locally rooted practices, it also contributes to cultural sustainability. Chapter 7 offers a concluding reflection on the key findings of this dissertation, emphasizing the plurality of values associated with alpaca garment production as seen through the practices of social enterprises involved in producing and marketing artisanal textiles in the Central Andean region.

6. Final reflections: plurality of values in artisanal alpaca garments

This chapter introduces a final reflection on the plurality of values promoted by organizations involved in producing and marketing alpaca garments. It shows how the business models of the social enterprises studied promote “slow fashion” practices that connect users with the natural landscapes and artisans behind the garments. As Fletcher (2014) highlights slow fashion enhances local knowledge and authenticity. The local practices of the social enterprises reconnect producers, herders and weavers, to the final customer promoting narratives of “socially conscious” consumption.

What sustainable values do slow fashion practices embody? Fletcher (2014), a leading advocate of the slow fashion movement, emphasizes the importance of artisanal local production and material diversification, both of which are exemplified in the production of alpaca garments. These core elements of slow fashion resonate with consumers, reinforcing perceived values such as exclusivity, authenticity, equity, localism, and functionality, as highlighted by Jung & Jin (2014) in their study of U.S. slow fashion consumers. These values are integral to the sustainable value propositions within slow fashion businesses, aligning closely with the social mission priorities of enterprises in the solidarity economy. Figure 8 below illustrates how slow fashion and sustainable value propositions are integrated into the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Figure 8. Interaction between slow fashion and the creation of sustainable value propositions for social enterprises.



Sources: self-elaboration from (Fletcher, 2008; Jung & Jin, 2014; Nyssens, Wanderley & Gaiger, 2019).

Social enterprises contribute to “reflexive re-localizing” by communicating the values and narratives embedded in each garment. As noted by an interviewee, “Behind each garment, there is a history, a culture, the experience of each female artisan” (I15, 2024). Unlike mass industrial production, which often marginalizes herders and artisans, these enterprises empower local producers and promote material diversity in collections that are “versatile and timeless” (I2, 2024). Therefore, alpaca garments are appreciated not only for their aesthetics but also for their sensory, emotional, and sustainable qualities, what Clark (2008) described as the “new beauty”. Another interviewee emphasized, “each garment carries the life story of the artisan who made it” (I15, 2024). Table 6 summarizes the diverse values identified in artisanal alpaca garments and the social enterprises studied.

Table 6. Plurality of values reproduced by social enterprises marketing artisanal alpaca garments.

| <i>Values</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|--|---|
| Caring for local communities (equity and localism) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Empowerment of Andean herders and traditional weavers - Association and leadership - Capacity-building on financial and technical aspects to improve production and commercialization |
| History for authenticity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traditional spinning and weaving techniques - Traditional knowledge for natural dyeing of fabrics - History of alpaca rearing communities: family ties and cultural heritage |
| Diversity and exclusivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artisanal work - Diverse natural alpaca colors |
| Product durability and efficiency | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A product that is durable and versatile |

Source: self-elaboration from the slow fashion values categorized by Jung & Jin (2014).

Social enterprises function as networks that strengthen the connections among herders, spinners, and weavers. Cooperatives such as Aymar Sawuri, Tejemujeres, Suri Paqocha, and Cooprogrocan prioritize the collective well-being of their members, while NGOs like Mosqoy, Descosur, and Fundación Artesanías de Chile, along with the family-run initiative Paqocha, are driven by social missions that go beyond individual profit motives. Following Alter's (2003) classification, these organizations are characterized as embedded and community-based social enterprises.

These social enterprises do more than just commercialize alpaca textiles; they actively enhance relationships with artisans, supporting the revitalization of traditional knowledge and practices. By reducing reliance on intermediaries, they enable Andean herders, spinners, and weavers to connect directly with consumers. A representative from a women's cooperative shared, "I have around 100 alpacas. I spin the wool, weave it myself, I do everything" (I14, 2024). These enterprises are "crafting disruptive models" by promoting artisanal entrepreneurship within marginalized communities (Brown & Vacca, 2022). As noted by a participant from an NGO, the goal is to empower artisans to become independent, organized, and gain access to fair commercialization channels where they receive equitable compensation for their products (I4, 2024).

Paying fair prices to fiber producers and weavers is a core value for these enterprises. However, they face significant challenges in commercialization due to the higher costs of their garments. As one interviewee noted, "Consumers want to buy the textiles, but they want them cheap" (I14, 2024). Despite the distinctiveness and authenticity of these products, organizations often struggle to achieve financial sustainability without external support. As highlighted by Smith et al. (2022) in the context of wool artisans in Poland and Norway, local producers who raise their prices risk losing accessibility for consumers. Effective communication of these complexities is essential but also challenging: conveying to consumers the true cost behind each garment, including fair compensation, taxes, administrative expenses, and the efforts in capacity building for artisans (I5, 2024).

In response, organizations have strategically emphasized the unique qualities of alpaca fiber and the value of artisanal craftsmanship. Their goal is to position these textiles as authentic, exclusive, locally produced, and timeless (see Jung & Jin, 2014). An NGO supporting artisanal weaving communities (I11, 2024) noted, "crafts are the means, not the end goal", emphasizing that the ultimate aim is to improve the living conditions of marginalized communities in the Andean highlands, and as mentioned in other cases, contribute to the revitalization of cultural heritage. For these social enterprises, localism and equity are essential values in the production of alpaca garments.

7. Discussion and conclusions

The research presented in this dissertation focuses on artisanal alpaca garments and slow fashion practices promoting cultural sustainability in the Central Andean region. The study emphasizes the strengths of local production and slow fashion practices as viable alternatives to globalized fashion chains. The dissertation studied eight social enterprises in the Andean highlands, which aim to create both social and economic value to artisans and herders. These organizations integrate slow fashion principles with traditional textile practices, thereby fostering cultural sustainability and local economic development.

Despite its environmental and ethical challenges, fashion plays a crucial role in personal well-being by fulfilling aesthetic desires and providing a path for identity construction (Fletcher, 2014). Jansen advocates for decolonizing fashion and turning the attention to the plurality of epistemologies influencing the “act of fashioning the body” (Jansen, 2020). The invitation is to look to those diverse possibilities existing beyond Euro-American norms (Jansen, 2020). Alpaca garments are the entry point for reflection on the revitalization of traditional textile methods, slower and local.

Alpaca garments as crafts are both a cultural expression and a spiritual experience that involves moving from landscapes to textures, by using the hands and body parts to create useful and beautiful textiles (Miller et al., 2022). The stories behind the garments reveal rich and emotional connections experienced as inner work and community practices. From communal practices like, “We dye the fiber together as a group, so it has the same shade of color for all of us” (I14, 2024) to individual experiences of profound connection with the fiber, “... behind every garment there is a life story of each artisan, her creativity, for that reason I always tell my fellow artisans you are culture, you are living culture” (I15, 2024).

The practices of these eight social enterprises correspond to those of slow fashion. A slow fashion approach prioritizes quality over quantity, with aesthetics that are rooted in both visual appeal and “abstract and emotional” elements. As discussed, this strategy leads to garments that are not only sustainable but also offer a deeply sensory experience (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2008). The slow fashion movement has

grown in the Global North fueled by claims for ethical behavior from big corporations (Fletcher, 2014). This dissertation shifts the focus to existing practices in the Central Andean region that promote a plurality of values through economic alternatives for marginalized communities in the highlands.

The eight social enterprises studied contribute to cultural sustainability by revitalizing traditional knowledge and practices. This includes the entire process, from alpaca rearing and weaving to the preservation of oral traditions, the incorporation of Quechua symbols in textiles, the use of endemic plants for dyeing, and the application of various weaving techniques, from knitting to loom work. All those artisanal processes can be lost due to the pressure of industrial production that favors quantity and lower costs. On the contrary, these social enterprises communicate authenticity and exclusivity to consumers, offering them the chance to "fashion their body" with garments designed to last a lifetime.

By mapping the organizations and comparing the business models of these initiatives, this dissertation contributes to a theoretical understanding of how sustainable business practices are implemented in the fashion industry. The aim is to increase the visibility of those initiatives that are working to change the textile system "within the place and living landscapes they are part of" (Smith et al., 2022, pp. 162-163). Recovering these memories is as suggested by Jansen (2020, p. 832), a "rebellion" from the past as a "site of experience" that can reveal "alternative trajectories of hope". The slow fashion movement and particularly, a decolonial approach to the industry is still emerging, but it has the potential of contributing with strong narratives that building from the past sustain localism and promote cultural sustainability.

The final aspect of slow fashion practices discussed in this dissertation is material diversity. As noted by Fletcher (2014), the fashion industry is dominated by polyester and cotton, being necessary to re-think alternative materials such as in this case alpaca fiber. It is unlikely nor desired that alpaca fiber replaces those mainstream materials. The invitation is for alpaca garments and local production to complement and influence the industry (Fletcher, 2014). Focusing on the lifetime of the garments and the real needs of local consumers can bring transformative change (Smith et al., 2022).

The final point of tension concerns scaling up. Local social enterprises face limitations in their growth potential, as scaling often requires adopting industrial practices. Some initiatives express a clear preference for remaining small and preserving their artisanal character, stating, “we do not want to, nor can we think of growing as a big company” (I1, 2024). Conversely, others view scaling as a strategic opportunity to enter broader markets, enhance their brand, and improve labor conditions for artisans, as indicated by those who see it as “the opportunity to enter the market” (I6, 2024). Finding a balance between meeting conventional market demands and maintaining traditional artisanal processes remains a significant challenge for these social enterprises.

Finally, addressing environmental challenges, including climate change and the conservation of highland ecosystems, is crucial. Animal welfare is also a significant concern. Alongside cultural sustainability, localism, and equity, the focus on alpacas and their fiber is essential. The future of alpaca textiles depends on both the preservation of highland ecosystems and the continuation of traditional artisanal skills.

Further research could explore the role of the State and policymakers to support regulations and initiatives that promote sustainable fashion practices while promoting the wellbeing of artisans. Additionally, consumer awareness is required to spread the benefits of sustainable and ethical fashion choices. Establishing networks for sharing knowledge and experiences among artisans could also present valuable opportunities for these local social enterprises.

Overall, this dissertation provides a hopeful glimpse for a more ethical and sustainable fashion industry that values the contributions of local communities. The social enterprises involved in marketing alpaca garments embody the principles of the slow fashion movement, with a focus on localism, equity, and authenticity. These values are crucial for cultural sustainability, and their enduring presence “against all odds” can be seen as a form of “rebellion” against conventional practices. From places to textures, alpaca garments embody rich narratives and the vibrant living culture of the artisans who create them.

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Appendix A. Internship reflection.

Adriana conducted her internship with Landesa, a US-based non-profit organization, focused on land rights. The internship lasted from the 23rd of October 2023 to the 15th of January 2024, online and on a part-time basis. Adriana worked directly with the Corporate Engagement team under the supervision of Laura Esbach. Landesa offered Adriana the opportunity to develop skills on land rights and private companies' efforts to secure land tenure and stakeholder engagement.

Landesa advocates for land security in rural communities around the world, particularly in Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia. It was founded in 1981, by Roy Prosterman, a professor at the University of Washington's School of Law. The organization is present in more than 50 countries and has offices in the United States, India, China, Myanmar, Tanzania and Liberia.

Landesa has the following thematic areas: climate change, women's land rights, and corporate engagement. Additionally, the organization focuses on global advocacy, research and evaluation for evidence-based decision-making in the land sector. Landesa has a Center for Women's Land Rights that focuses on gender-equal rights to women and girls in marginalized communities. The Center advocates for gender-equal rule of law and capacity building for government and civil society.

The Corporate Engagement team works with companies and investors to build sustainable supply chains. Land rights are crucial for companies to obtain the social license within the communities where they operate. The team advises companies on legal and socially sound land-based investments to meet global standards of corporate behavior. Landesa has worked on corporate policy development with business groups, such as Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Unilever, and Nestlé. Those are companies that invest in agricultural land and want to improve their policies to avoid land risks and contribute to local development.

Adriana was directly involved in four different projects at the Corporate Engagement team. The first one, involved doing research on the possible land tenure and land use implications of reforestation projects implemented worldwide across Nestlé's supply chain in Africa and Latin America. The projects were implemented as

part of Nestlé's sustainable landscapes project which intended to decrease deforestation in their supply chains. Such efforts involve stakeholders beyond the supply chains, primary farmers and local rural communities of regions where Nestlé sources its raw materials.

The second task focused on supporting the creation of Exchange, a global network dedicated to natural resource management. Adriana assisted the lead consultant during semi-structured interviews with various external partners to understand their main expectations and challenges faced. The insights from these interviews were analyzed to be compiled into a report, which aimed to provide recommendations for improving the community of practice.

The third assignment involved summarizing examples of the private sector supporting land rights formalization. While such initiatives are typically led by governmental agencies, there are examples of companies contributing to land rights formalization globally. The projects were implemented in Côte d'Ivoire and Mozambique through the cacao and sugar supply chains.

The final and largest project addressed the right to free, prior, and informed consultation on carbon projects in Peruvian indigenous territories. Partnering with Conservation International, the project involved extensive desktop research in preparation for fieldwork conducted by the research group later during the spring of 2024. Adriana's contributions included reviewing secondary data, reports, legal documents, and other materials provided by Conservation International. The research focused on the Awajún indigenous communities, Indigenous REDD+ initiatives, and the right to consultation.

Adriana contributed to the Corporate Engagement team by conducting desktop research and online interviews. Her efforts resulted in drafting several reports to inform the team and support advisory tasks for companies. Working within an interdisciplinary team, Adriana improved her reporting skills to effectively summarize information in clear and accessible formats.

As a result of the internship, Adriana acquired comprehensive knowledge of land rights, especially the latest applicable human rights standards. She improved her understanding of the key intersections between corporate engagement and the land

rights of local communities, particularly by identifying critical land risks within company value chains.

Adriana conducted research on best practices for responsible disengagement and comparative experience of private sector engagement in land rights formalization. As part of it, she was able to attend a virtual course on land rights provided by Landesa. This was an opportunity to learn about corporate engagement with local rural communities involved in the agricultural supply chains of companies worldwide.

As part of the Exchange network, Adriana participated in conducting online stakeholder interviews to key partners. She learned about the process to create and strengthen an international community of practice. The practical knowledge acquired will contribute to Adriana future professional development.

The project with Conservation International in Peru involved doing background research in preparation of fieldwork. Through this opportunity, Adriana learned about carbon rights and improved her understanding of the right to free, prior and informed consent to indigenous peoples. She had the chance to prepare reports but also be actively involved in the preparation for the fieldwork in Peru.

Adriana had a positive and enriching experience working with a non-profit organization focused on corporate engagement and land rights. This opportunity deepened her interest in the role of private companies in rural communities where raw materials are sourced. Adriana's master dissertation focuses on social enterprises working with rural communities in the Andean highlands. Learning about successful collaborations between companies and local communities inspired her as she developed her master's thesis.

As an intern, Adriana improved her research and reporting skills while working in an interdisciplinary team. Alongside gaining knowledge, she developed practical skills that will benefit her professional path, both through the results she produced and through interactions with experienced colleagues. Adriana also had the opportunity to network and receive mentoring from senior practitioners. Landesa provided the right environment to enhance Adriana's professional skills in a supportive setting. Despite the time difference between Europe and Seattle, she effectively learned to work online

with teams across different time zones. Adriana highly recommends Landesa for future interns.