

# FABtalks

by ABURY

## FASHION, ARTS AND BUSINESS

### B CORP USING FASHION AS A FORCE FOR GOOD

*The idea behind the FABtalks is to host fresh fashion talks in an inspiring environment and connect them with business-networking in a new innovative way. The aim is to trigger interesting discussions about the topic of fashion and let experts respond to open questions. Ultimately, we want to build an interdisciplinary network and establish and implement projects together in the long run.*



On the 16th of January the FABtalks took place within the NEONYT Berlin during the Berlin Fashion Week. Benjamin Marias of AIR France and Bert van Son, CEO of MUD Jeans, spoke with our host Andrea in the *Schaltraum* of the Berlin KRAFTWERK about "BCorp - Using Fashion as a Force for Good".

At the beginning of the event Andrea Bury, who is also the founder of ABURY, explained how the B Corp certification process went for her company and what B Corp certification actually is. B Corp stands for B Corporation and is a private certification for for-profit companies that use their business to do good.

ABURY has been certified since May 2017 and each team member has been involved from the beginning. The certification of B Corp includes the evaluation, testing and analysis of all aspects of a company. From production, to employee management, waste management, to the bank that the company uses and much more. All this is checked by an online questionnaire and then evaluated. If all criteria and B Corp's standards are met, the company is included in the register and receives the required certification. There are currently 2655 certified B Corp companies around the world. These are spread across 150 different nations and 60 different industries.



## Summary of the Presentations:

### 1. Benjamin Marias of AIR Coop

One certified B Corp is AIR Coop, a consulting company based in France. Benjamin Marias, Founder and Co-Director, represented them at the FABTalks.

AIR Coop consists of a team of 9 employees and was certified by B Corp in 2015. They were the second French company to receive this status. As with ABURY, all employees are involved in the certification process, which is repeated every 2 years. Compliance with all standards and approaches on how to achieve further

optimization in every re-certification serves as motivation and driving force for the company.

The company deals with sustainability consulting, innovation management and supports other companies in working not only sustainably, but also profit-oriented. Through the *Declaration of Interdependence* required by B Corp, they are aligned with other companies and were able to expand their worldwide network of business partners. In addition, they have generous co-working spaces that enable them to work together on innovative concepts and strategies. These are often shared with other consulting firms, as most B Corp-certified companies come from the consulting sector and not from the fashion scene. This resulted in the change from a classic, "GmbH"-like company to a cooperative business form and the entry as "entreprise à mission".



Benjamin is most convinced of B Corp's shared vision of being able to use his business for something good and constantly improve together with other companies.

## 2. Bert van Son of MUD Jeans

Bert began working in the textile industry at the age of 23, when fashion companies still insisted on winter and summer collections. When spring and autumn collections came, he could still make friends with them and did not see any negative developments in the near future. But when Fast Fashion established itself, he noticed how much the garbage industry in China was exploited and how much the environment suffered as a result. Later he had a company in France which he was able to sell successfully. This gave him time off to think about how he could change things. At some point he reached a status in which he had the financial means, a large network and years of experience in the textile industry. In short, he asked himself: "What is the best-selling product and how can you do it better? The jeans."



But there was a lot to do in areas such as raw material sourcing, dyeing and fabricating. Seven years ago he founded his company, MUD Jeans, as a result of his considerations. He started with organic cotton, 40% recycled cotton, fair payment and production sites that are not too far from home to prevent pollution

from long transport. After some time, he felt responsible for what happened to the jeans after the purchase and how to turn this into a sustainable cycle. It all started with returning your old jeans and getting a discount. But then the concept of leasing began; why can't you just lease a pair of jeans, was the question that came up...

Although the press reported rather mockingly about it up to the Wall Street Journal, he had 3000 leasing contracts within a short amount of time. Unfortunately, the concept was in its infancy and turned into a nightmare, with friends telling him that the debit from their accounts didn't work properly and other customers simply changed their bank details without Bert noticing. In the meantime, they have developed a sophisticated system that allows them to view their own leasing contracts and the system itself online. On his way to becoming one of the most sustainable jeans companies in the world, he met more and more young people who already had hundreds of ideas and several improvements in store for him.

One of these suggestions was: Why don't you and your company become a part of B Corp? After some research, he discovered that the values of B Corp and his company were the same and that he could do exactly what he always wanted to do: use his business for something good. This way MUD Jeans became one of the first B Corp companies in Holland and made a mark. They had a very good score right from the start, but during the second re-certification he noticed that there was still room for improvement. So Bert and his company decided to work on getting as high as possible on the ranking list of the B Corps. At present, they hold the top values in the environmental sector.

Ever since MUD Jeans became part of B Lab's certification, Bert began to look around to see what aspects of his company could be supported by other B Corps. Now the bank and accounting company that MUD Jeans uses are also BCorp certified companies. For example, the money deposited by Bert is not used to finance dubious things such as making war goods.

For him the biggest advantage of BCorp is that the future employees, who share the same vision, became aware of MUD Jeans and approached him. This has enabled him to bring very talented, highly motivated and ambitious team members on board who help him to continually optimise his company. What also excites him about it are the other BCorp companies that he gets to know through his business trips. They share the same vision and give him the sense of cohesion needed to make the world a better place.

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## Open Discussion

### Audience question to Bert van Son:

*You said you had to change your legal form as soon as you became a Bcorp company?*

Depending on the country, you have to change the legal form to ensure that if you sell the company, it remains a B Corp company. In addition, the B Corp certification is only recognized by the state in some countries, such as Italy.



### Viewer question to Benjamin Marias:

*Have you changed to a cooperative legal form because of Bcorp?*

No, this was our decision as there is no officially recognized legal form for B Corp companies in France. In addition, companies that are certified B Corps must register in France as "entreprise à mission".

**Audience question to all:**

*Has their operating style changed since they became part of Bcorp?*

*Benjamin:* Yes, because I didn't know B Lab and its certification when AIR Coop was founded. Above all, internal structures and the way decisions are made were significantly influenced.

*Bert:* No, because we were already a social business. It only led to optimizing more aspects of the company and to acting even more sustainably.

*Andrea:* Also no, because ABURY was already a social business. However, electricity providers, waste management and other services were changed to be more sustainable.

Thanks to our partners NEONYT, Flair Magazine, B Corporation & Dr. Hauschka!

**SEE YOU NEXT TIME!**