

Eco textiles

English Summary

Grolink AB
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Background

This is a summary of a study that Grolink conducted on behalf of the three eco labelling organisations in Sweden: KRAV, SIS Ecolabelling, the Swedish Society of Nature Conservation, and the Swedish Consumer Board. The study was conducted by Per Jiborn.

The basis for the study is a questionnaire that was sent out to textile companies in Sweden, Finland and Denmark and interviews with a limited number of important actors.

The textile sector in Sweden has an annual turnover of SEK 40 Billion and the average Swede spend 5 percent of their income on clothing. The total imports amounts to 250 thousand tonnes, which average 30 kilos per person and year. However there is quite some export and re-export taking place. Famous Swedish textile companies are H&M and Ikea.

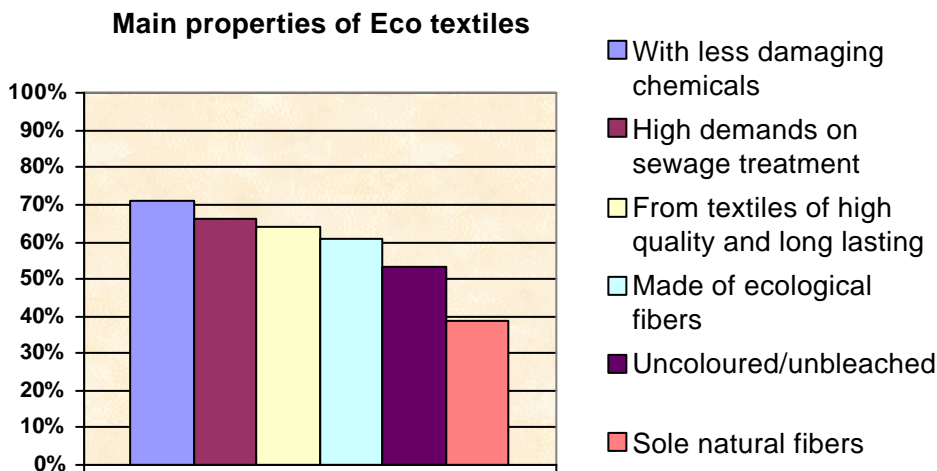
Replies to the Questionnaire

Approximately 20 percent of the companies responded to the questionnaire.

Most important property of Ecological Textiles

Main properties of ecological textiles were:

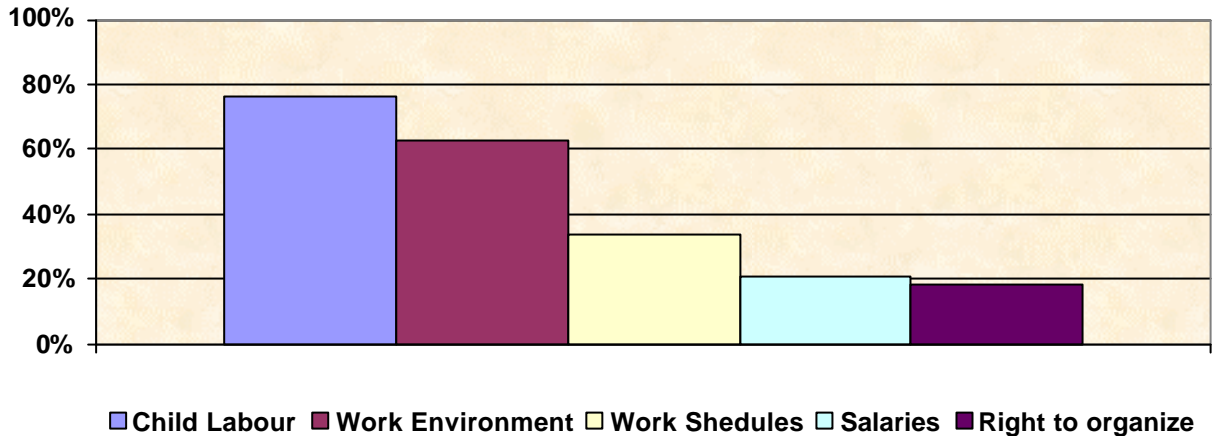
- Processed with less damaging inputs.
- Processing units with good sewage treatment.
- Fabrics of good quality and long lasting.
- Ecologically grown fibres.



Social conditions

The questionnaire also included questions about the social conditions. 40 percent of the respondents were prepared to take responsibility also for the social conditions in the production.

Important social factors to control



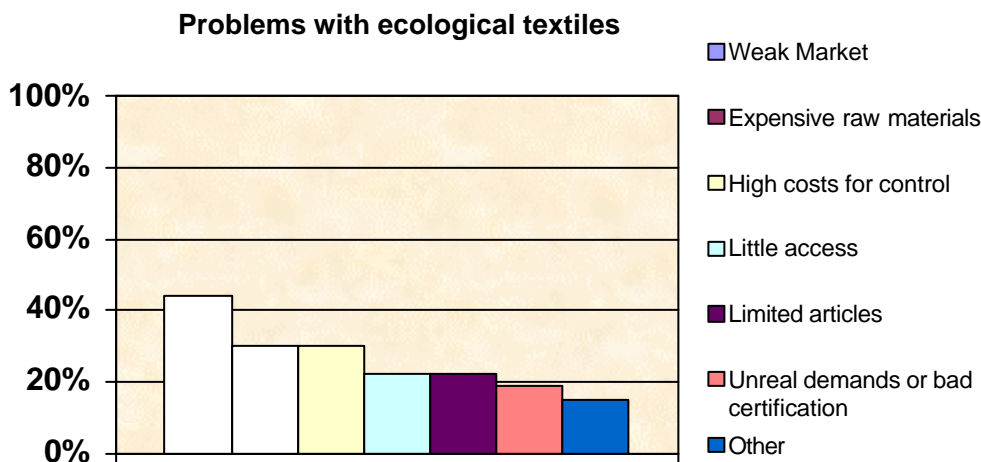
40 percent of the respondents considered that it would be advantageous if social and environmental certification could be combined.

The market

The customers interest in eco textiles is consider being weak (49%) or average. Ten percent of the respondents considered the demand to be null and less that 10 percent considered the demand to be strong.

Problems encountered by companies that currently are marketing eco textiles

A special section of the questionnaire was directed to the companies that actually market eco textiles. Their response to what they saw as the major problem is showed in the graph below.



Interviews with textile companies

The interviews with textile importers confirmed the weak demand. Several claimed that any eco label will compete/conflict with the own brand. They thought existing eco labelling systems were cumbersome and that the standards lack realism. They underlined the need for international standards. They favour to establish general minimum criteria, education of personnel and environmental management systems over eco labels.

The textile producers that were interviewed also confirmed lack of demand as a major factor. The companies that had own experience of eco labelling though that current systems and standards are not flexible enough.

Grolink's recommendations

Grolink's analysis indicates the lack of a suitable range of articles as a limiting factor. There are also signals that environmental arguments should not be emphasized in the marketing of textiles, since consumers want to enjoy buying clothes.

It is too early to discard eco labelling of textiles as inappropriate but the results of the study may cause eco-labelling organisations to reconsider their policies. They may also consider introducing simpler systems for certification of companies and/or inputs. Under Swedish conditions the situation with three competing eco labels in such a small sectors as ecological textiles make little sense, and Grolink advice them to co-operate and harmonise with the final goal of creating a unified system.