

Esther Verburg, General Manager, MADE-BY Benelux

Esther Verburg is the Benelux General Manager for MADE-BY, a not-for-profit European organisation which works with fashion brands to improve the social and environmental sustainability of their supply chains.

Esther has worked for MADE-BY since 2005, shortly after the organisation's launch, and has had a leading part in shaping and building up the organisation to its current form. "I joined MADE-BY from the desire to help establish change in the industry when it comes to the way we do business. Fashion is an emotional product and we should be able to make and wear it without harming the environment or the people working in the supply chains. I think that if done right, fashion can also be an inspiration to consumers and other industries to make their lifestyles and practices more sustainable. Next to that, doing business in a responsible way is also a lot more fun! We see the motivating effects of this in many companies. " It is not an easy job though. "Fashion supply chains are complex. Combined with the fact that transparency will become one of the most important features of CR in the coming few years, this requires a brand to take a deep dive in their organisation and the way they organise their production. If you want to become truly transparent, it also requires guts to be open about what you have not yet brought to an acceptable level. Our partner brands have shown that courage and supply their consumers with open and honest information."

Before becoming the General Manager for Benelux in August 2008, Esther has held the positions of supply chain consultant and of business development manager at MADE-BY. "Having worked closely together with our partner brands on making their supply chains more sustainable and talking to many different brands about their needs in this area gives me the insight I need as a general manager to know in which direction we should develop our organisation to achieve the best level of service to our partner brands and clients. Every brand is different and has a unique position, whether you consider their brand, their production set up or their financial situation. We need to be able to provide tailor-made services to any brand, and we are."

Through her work with many different fashion and textile brands in the past 6 years, Esther has obtained a deep knowledge on the development of CR (corporate responsibility) strategies. "Today, every fashion brand knows it must do something with sustainability. The key to a successful sustainability program is thinking through how this program fits within your business strategy, and where it can add value. Developing and marketing styles in organic cotton will not be a good fit for every company. You need to find out where CR can help you achieve your business goals, what your customer expects from you and in what way sustainability matches with your brand and with your company culture. The companies that do this well will find that a CR program can add real and lasting value to their business, and will be the ones to be successful in the coming years."

Before joining MADE-BY, Esther Verburg worked as a strategy consultant in the Netherlands and Japan, and has held various supply chain management positions at multinational Heineken, the Netherlands.