

Objective One case study knowledge economy

Rapanui Clothing

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The projects in the Knowledge Economy investment cluster include those developing the Combined Universities and activities that support the development of much stronger links between Higher Education and business.

Developing the Combined Universities in Cornwall is considered so important to the development of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly it was the only project specifically outlined in the Single Programming Document contract. Prior to commencing the Objective One Programme in 2000, there was no such university opportunity in Cornwall.

University level provision in Cornwall and its links with business encourages graduates to start their own businesses, attracts new business and encourages innovation and knowledge transfer, thereby increasing the overall wealth of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.

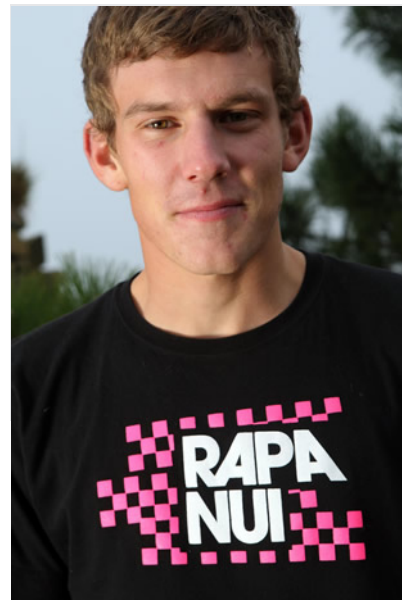
Rapanui Clothing - sustainable company links Cornwall and India

A Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) renewable energy graduate who started sketching surfwear designs in his spare time has used his passion for sustainability to turn his hobby into a growing business.

Mart Drake-Knight, 21, graduated in June 2008 in Renewable Energy from the University of Exeter's course at the CUC hub campus Tremough, Penryn. CUC was the flagship project of the European Objective One Programme in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. The first degree of its kind in the world, the BSc in Renewable Energy is run by Camborne School of Mines, part of the University of Exeter.

In June, having found his surfwear designs were in demand, Mart had already set up Rapanui - www.rapanuiclothing.com - with his brother Rob. He has recently taken on Pam Stubberfield, a former buyer for Marks and Spencer, and Ben South, also a graduate from the University of Exeter's Tremough Campus (Conservation Biology). Wholesale clients include Ben and Jerry's, Centrica and the Marine Conservation Society. It has also been listed in the 2008 Top 100 business start ups.

The company is committed to ethical, sustainable trade and this is driven by Mart, who works from his Falmouth home. He said: "I was always interested in the environment and when I was six I wrote a letter to the bin man about landfill. Then I got into surfing



Mart Drake-Knight, a Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) renewable energy graduate who set up Rapanui Clothing with his brother Rob

but used to get infections from pollution in the sea. Then the degree course really opened my eyes up – the Peak Oil theory and climate change were my motivators.

"I started thinking about eco-design ideas then six months later realised I had started my own business. It has just spiralled since then. It is a small but flexible business and at every part of the product life cycle we relentlessly question the source."

Carleen Kelemen, Director of the Objective One Partnership, said: "Mart is one of a growing number of graduates who can now choose to work in Cornwall, either by taking quality jobs or by using their knowledge and skills to set up their own companies."

Professor Matthew Evans, Provost of the University of Exeter's Cornwall Campus at Tremough, said: "We are proud of all our graduates, many of whom go on to do amazing things. Mart has been inspired by his academic studies to do something truly groundbreaking. I wish him every success with his enterprise."

Amongst its many affiliations, Rapanui garments are from Fair Wear Foundation approved factories, certified Soil Association organic and working with the Carbon Trust. The clothing – made out of organic cotton or bamboo – is biodegradable, hypo allergenic

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and eco friendly. A factory in Tamil Nadu has been kitted out with solar panels and wind turbines and the cotton is transported there by camel not truck. The product is then shipped to the UK, rather than flown, and all items are hand finished by local businesses for bespoke wholesale or retail.

“We chose Tamil Nadu because it was renowned for bad work practice and we wanted to change that,” said Mart, whose own vehicle is run on bio diesel. “Month on month we have increased the number of products being made in this carbon neutral factory, now about 40% of our range. Being a member of the Fairwear Foundation means we are not just ethical with farmers but the factory workers too.

“Rapanui is an ever evolving exercise in eco design. It was such a mission for us to see where our products came from. We are totally transparent and on our website people can see the whole product life cycle with photographs even to the extent of how a label is stitched on. And that has been picked up by competitors, which is good to see.”

For more information about the Combined Universities in Cornwall visit www.cuc.ac.uk.



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