Preface

Wow, it’s done! While I am happy it is finished, the insertion of the final full stop is much more difficult than I had imagined. The finalisation of this thesis means the end of a journey that I have greatly enjoyed and of which little more than a tiny fragment is reported here (I once planned to write a ‘True Story’-version, but well…).

I hope that at least at a few points in the following academic chapters my appreciation for La Laguna and its people shines through. This study is about an incredibly industrious industrial region with wonderful people. A region that has known many adverse conditions, with people that face these conditions and ride out their ride to the end. People that recognise an opportunity and do not hesitate to react to it. The entrepreneurial spirit of La Laguna is impressive. I was most impressed by the people of my age, or younger, that managed and/or owned garment factories, bore the responsibility for their personnel and did so with reckless courage, respect and great determination. Equally striking were the pioneers of the old times who watched and followed the changes of the new times but refused to get caught up in the turmoil and madness of globalisation in which not even the sky appeared to be accepted as the limit. Mi respeto. I hope to have done justice to your daily work and maybe in some way to have contributed to it by sketching what you are up against.

The hesitation and suspicion that also characterise the Laguna garment cluster, made a maximum call on my stubborn nature and caused me to spend hours on the phone, but they usually dissolved during the first minutes of an interview. Many interviews were thoroughly enjoyable and I want to thank everybody who contributed their time and expertise to this study – they are listed in Annex 1. Most special were those interviews in which the very Mexican mixing of business and personal [how come several of these talks turned to Amsterdam, Utrecht, my ambitions and then back to their sons or nephews?] sparked a connection. A few people need to be mentioned here personally: Rigoberto Soto, Roberto Tohmé, Juan Miranda, Felipe Pamanes, Fernando Carzo and the Juárez family: thanks for always receiving me with a smile, open arms and new information.

A number of organisations also supported me. I am indebted to the UAL for giving me an office to work from. Most especially I am indebted to Lic. Pepe Castro for it was his office that I was to share. You were a good colleague and regulator of my work pace. SECOFI-Torreón, CNIV and FOMEC have also given me their much appreciated help.

Life in La Laguna has been more than ‘just’ this study. I have tried to have my own place and have had many different addresses in La Laguna. But I most enjoyed my time with Rhodante, Adela, Hans and Wilma and especially Piet and Martha, who opened their houses to me and have contributed immeasurably to my feeling at home in Torreón and Cd. Lerdo. Also, several women have tried to upgrade my cooking, make-up and dancing skills, assuring me of their indispensability. While not much has come of making mole or tamales, I have really enjoyed the hours spent chatting, dancing, eating and cooking [or looking] in the kitchens of Tita & Nena, Sandra [and family] and Martha. Finally, looking out over the city from Cristo Rey, driving through the countryside [with the radio blasting] or the city centre to look at the mariachis,
enjoying the scent of the orange tree blossom and listening to Mexican pop music make very vivid and cherished memories. Jorge, Ernesto, Lalo or Alberto were there with me in many of these moments. I need to thank you for being my friends and for being there whenever I needed a shoulder, hand or a good laugh. The time spent with you left me with a liking for hats and cowboy boots, for Mexican music of all kinds and a love for the desert and cacti that have not always been easy to match with my daily routine in Utrecht (but have definitely made it more colourful). Gracias.

There were also times when I felt lost or out of place and at those moments I could almost bet on the miraculous appearance of one of my two 'wise old men': Cor Zwezerijnen and Allen Levine. With their outsider views, Cor’s contagious laughs and Allen’s sarcasm they never failed to cheer me up and put me back on track. Cor: I really enjoyed our trips to the factories but feel I still need to apologise for my possibly all-too-adapted driving style that appeared to really scare you.

Another halfway station between La Laguna and home was [Johannah, Julian and] Cheryl’s kitchen in El Paso. A place to put things in perspective, to relax and to get inspired again. Cheryl, I hope you know what a difference you have made, just by listening and making time to share a drink at your kitchen table.

Each time I came back from the Mexican desert and sun I had trouble re-adjusting to the dreary Dutch reality, which appeared to be personified by the architectonial horrors of the van Unnikgebouw. I am glad that after my first fieldwork my colleague and friend Gery Nijenhuis suggested we might share an office, which we soon turned into a semi-jungle with colourful posters on the wall. That greatly eased the transitions. The friendship, support, coffee and lunches shared with Gery and our other colleagues Leendert, Floor and Paul made the writing phases and grey weather seem okay (and were missed during the last six months of self-imposed isolation). Thanks.

Of course, my promotores Otto Verkoren and Menno Vellinga and co-promotor Guus van Westen deserve many thanks. Otto has been greatly involved with this project ever since (and even before) its conception. His steadfast, calm and reassuring focus on the larger picture and efforts to tame my impatience have been vital to its successful finalisation. Despite the distance Menno’s encouraging e-mails arrived just at the right moment and struck the right cord. I am also thankful for Guus van Westen’s late but valuable involvement in this project. Meetings with Guus were never very long, but always to the point, helpful and encouraging.

For the nice-looking book that you now have in front of you, thanks are due to Rien Rabbers at the KartLab who made the figures and did the final lay-out and to Jeremy Rayner who corrected my English.

Of course, there are ‘innocent bystanders’ who proved to be of vital importance. Invaluable are those friends who always knew when to ask and when not to ask... I want to thank my parents for setting me off on the adventure path; they gave me the freedom and confidence to search for my own ways and never held me back on account of their own doubts (and of course for telling me to stick with it when that was what I needed to hear). Finally, ‘eagle-eye’ Quinten has worked very hard to eliminate my typos and organise my reference system chaos when I was
really fed up with those sides of the study. More importantly, he never doubted the fact that one day this would all be over and has supported me until it was. Love.

Utrecht, August 2003.