

New Ways in Fashion - Road to Circularity



May 19th, 2022



Emily Macintosh, Francesca Romana Rinaldi

The EU consumption of textiles amounts to 675 million tonnes of raw materials every year, while 73% of all textiles end up in land-fill or incineration. Carrying many environmental issues, the textiles industry is one of the most polluting industries for the planet. We discussed the challenges and problems in the current business models and policies as well as some hopeful outlooks with Francesca Romana Rinaldi and Emily Macintosh.

Francesca Romana Rinaldi, Director of the Circular Fashion Masterclass at SDA Bocconi School of Management, introduced the necessary developments and key factors vital in reshaping the fashion industry towards sustainability and responsible innovation. She presented traceability and transparency, circularity and collaborative consumption as the “Three Drivers of Change”. Traceability and transparency are important enablers to justify circularity and sustainability claims, which is crucial in fighting greenwashing and creating trust in the industry. The second driver, circularity is an accelerator to steer companies out of their traditional, linear value chain approach. It requires eco-design principles to be implemented in the very first stage of the value chain to plan ahead for continued use of materials and source appropriately. Francesca points out that the communication and engagement activity needs to

shift to a much more one-to-one approach from one-to-many, in order to include final users in a take-make-remake model to prolong product life. This includes educating final users to use better, care more and on how to dispose properly. The third driver, collaborative consumption disrupts distribution and sales, as it boosts the potential to “recommerce” secondhand products and to rent clothes. This is about developing new services on how to extend the life of a garment. Francesca shared a positive view that these changes will happen in less than 8 years, before 2030.

At the end of March 2022, the European Commission released the EU Strategy for Sustainable Textiles. Emily Macintosh, Policy Officer for Textiles at the European Environmental Bureau (EEB), gave an overview of the policy framework and examined to what extent the proposed measures would be able to meet the goals of the ambitious vision. The main part of the strategy is the new Binding Ecodesign measures, which is a regulation on the textile products put on the EU market to meet certain standards on aspects like durability, repairability, and recyclability. While they are important, Emily points out that we should not misunderstand that it is not only to replace broken products that drives new consumption. What is lacking

is the holistic view that goes beyond looking at the physical properties of the product and to look at the economic condition in which those products are sold. There needs to be specific measures on having less products and to think about the enormous amount of products that are already in the market. There are also limits to recycling - most recycled textiles are downcycled, and fiber-to-fiber recycling is in its infancy. The Textiles Strategy does recognise plastic bottles recycling into fibers as greenwashing, which is also the source of microplastic shedding. However, there is no perfect fiber and it is an important point that comparing fibers is complex: methodologies behind the comparison often protect vested interests and the data used have different boundaries. Calculating, tracking, comparing and communicating the impact of textiles will be the topic to look out for. The difficulty in substantiating

green claims links to the need for full supply chain mapping and facility disclosure. A digital product passport could be an opportunity to supply that as part of a coherent approach.

What the Textiles Strategy did not address was the mechanics of the business model; the workers were left out of the equation. There needs to be action on purchasing practices and power imbalances in the industry - this is what underpins the overproduction and exploitation of workers.

The idea of fast fashion as a democratisation of clothing is no longer valid - and the opportunity and desire for cheap, short-lived clothes is continuing to drive consumption because it remains available. The panelists noted in concluding remarks that journalists have a key role to tell a story that is yet to be told and to break through the greenwashing in sustainability.



Relevant websites:

<https://www.sdabocconi.it/en/home>

<https://eeb.org/>

https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/textiles-strategy_en

<https://www.thesustainabilitypledge.org/index.html>

<https://eeb.org/library/driving-a-circular-economy-for-textiles-through-epr/>

<https://www.businesstribune.org/news/inditex-will-invest-100-million-euros-in-the-fiber-of-the-future/2652.html>

<https://www.egeaeditore.it/ita/prodotti/settori-economici/fashion-industry-2030.aspx>
