

CLOSING AND SLOWING THE LOOP

Innovative business models in the textile sector – an overview

It is increasingly acknowledged, even by industry, that fashion needs to apply ecological thinking to develop innovative ideas for evolving its practice beyond the growth and consumption model that dominates fashion today. The reality of planetary boundaries sets limits on production and consumption. It also obliges the industry to experiment and look into alternatives to the “make-buy-use-dispose” model.

There is a need for alternative business models that encourage durability, lease, repair, lending or re-selling, that focus on the use and end-of-life phases of clothing. Relevant models maximize the value that can be drawn from a textile for example by keeping responsibility for the ownership of clothing with the manufacturer, instead of passing it on after the point of sale.

This summary does not attempt to present an exhaustive list of examples, but focuses instead on giving an overview of the various models that currently exist – some of them well-known, others less so. The field appears to be developing rapidly with many fashion houses re-thinking and developing their current activities in response to increasingly scarce resources.

To be able to implement the Detox commitment, but also to develop new ways of production, brands need to work on the stability of their supply chains. Long term relationships with suppliers, built on mutual trust, are key for any long lasting and deeper changes that fashion brands intend to do.

Disruptions usually start small – last year Greenpeace started talking to brands committed to Detox about making multiple transformations to their supply chains and business models to make them fit for the future. This year’s Detox Catwalk does not assess brands on their efforts on “slowing and closing the loop” as we are still experimenting and scoping these ideas with the industry. In future the Detox campaign will take a closer look at this issue and whether brands’ daily practices are moving towards closing and slowing their loops.

Initiatives by the industry

The following are some examples of initiatives, which fall under the following broad categories:

- **In-store collection with a partner**
- **Circular design thinking**
- **Online-marketplaces for used products**
- **Purchasing according to need**
- **Alternative fashion calendar**
- **Hiring, leasing and borrowing**
- **Production for long life**
- **Upcycling**

Examples of **in-store collection with a partner** are widespread. In an effort to collect used clothes and bring down the amounts of textile waste sent to landfill Marks & Spencer¹ has initiated a partnership with charity organization Oxfam, amongst other things. It introduced the concept of “shwopping” where customers can hand in clothing for re-use and receive bonus points which can be exchanged for new purchases. An initiative from H&M² is also taking back all types of used clothes

¹ <http://www.marksandspencer.com/s/plan-a-shwopping>

² <http://about.hm.com/en/About/sustainability/commitments/reduce-waste/garment-collecting.html>

from all brands, in a partnership up with global textile collector I:Co, part of the SOEX group. All these models include refunds on future purchases of new clothes, which raises the question of whether this leads to a net reduction of the environmental impacts caused by textiles as customers get incentives for buying new stuff. It also does not keep ownership of used textiles.

H&M also works in parallel on **circular design thinking** (closing the loops)³ on the constant recovery of materials so that it can continue supplying its customers with new clothing without using virgin materials. Design for recycling is a hot topic in design, but is in its early stages. To advance research some companies team up with smaller start-ups. For example H&M invested directly in the London based start-up “Worn Again”,⁴ which is developing a technique to chemically recycle mixed fibres (polyester – cotton). The US denim company Levi’s partnered with Seattle based start-up “Evrnu” to break down cotton garment waste to the molecular level and convert it into pulp. The first Levi’s jeans prototype came on the market in early 2016 – it turned five cotton T-shirts into one pair of jeans.⁵

Circularity is also supported by Government programmes such as the EU initiative trash-2-cash,⁶ which funds design driven materials innovations that can be used by brands.

Patagonia’s business model includes many different types of activities that are cutting-edge, for example: offering repair services for damaged goods;⁷ **an online-marketplace for used** Patagonia products to be sold for re-use in collaboration with eBay;⁸ and finally the take back of all their products for recycling.⁹ One way to communicate its unique business model has been via its “don’t buy this jacket” campaign. The message is intended to encourage people to consider the effects of consumerism on the environment and **purchase only what they need** (slowing the loops).

Also luxury brands are trying to slowing down and work **against the pressure of a fashion calendar** that is pressuring designers to deliver constantly new styles and trends. For example, from September 2016 onwards, Burberry will no longer have four shows a year, to be replaced with only two shows. In addition, the shows in February and September will combine womenswear and menswear collections. Burberry also offers repair services for their clothing.¹⁰

Hiring, leasing and borrowing are not yet as common as some of the models presented above. But they have great potential within the industry as it is already common to buy and sell used clothing. Dutch brand MUD has offered leasing services for jeans since 2013.¹¹ The jeans remain the property of MUD jeans. This is the same with clothing libraries where you can borrow clothes (similar to books). There are various models, but common to them all is that the customer borrows a handful of items for a certain lending period (e.g. 30 days) for a monthly fee.¹² This can also be seen as a test to see how people respond to the new concept of giving up ownership and cherishing the on-going use of clothing over time. Lending and sharing saves resources as it means fewer pieces are bought and every item has multiple users, which also requires design for longevity.

³ <http://about.hm.com/en/About/sustainability/commitments/reduce-waste/closing-the-loop.html>

⁴ <http://wornagain.info/>

⁵ <http://www.levistrauss.com/unzipped-blog/2016/05/levi-strauss-co-evrnu-create-first-pair-of-jeans-from-post-consumer-cotton-waste/>

⁶ <http://www.trash2cashproject.eu>

⁷ <http://www.patagonia.com/us/returns-repairs/start.jsp>

⁸ <http://www.patagonia.com/us/worn-wear>

⁹ <http://www.patagonia.com/reuse-recycle.html>

¹⁰ Burberry annual progress report, May 2016, p.2: <http://www.burberryplc.com/documents/action-plan/burberry-annual-progress-review-2016.pdf>

and http://www.burberryplc.com/media_centre/press_releases/2016/burberry_announces_changes_to_its_runway_and_retail_calendar

¹¹ <http://www.mudjeans.eu/about/>

¹² See for example: <http://www.fastcoexist.com/3045366/change-generation/at-this-fashion-library-you-check-out-clothes-instead-of-buying-them> and <http://www.kleiderei.com>

Long-life producers design for a long life and high-quality garments. There are no tests to pass for a producer that claims to design long-lasting products or high-quality clothes and it is unfortunately also not common for fashion brands to offer durability guarantees, as is done for products such as electronics or white goods. Some inspiring ideas to change this have arisen recently, such as the UK menswear designer Thomas Cridland offering a “30 year sweatshirt”, specifically manufactured to last that long and with a 30 year warranty.¹³ Others, such as the Swedish denim brand Nudie, focus on creating timeless and durable clothing and make it an important aspect of its philosophy and brand identity which also incorporates the idea of celebrating craftsmanship, which is no longer considered by many major fashion brands.¹⁴ Nudie also sell jeans that come with a life-long service for free repair, which is done in their stores and offer repair kits to encourage their customers to start mending and repairing again.

Upcycling increases the value of clothing, makes it special and gives it a new life. Upcycling fashion companies are the ultimate expression of the slow fashion movement which opposes the fast fashion world of throw-away-clothing. A good overview of designers and brands making cutting edge-clothing from upcycled materials is provided in the book “Refashioned” –published by the designer, writer and ethical fashion activist Sass Brown.¹⁵

Finally, not all recycling initiatives are positive. Some initiatives are “end of pipe” solutions, acting much too late, rather than changing the design of products and the way we use them at source, to make them resource efficient (durable), reusable and recyclable. Currently, a fashionable but questionable recycling approach is to **retrieve plastics from oceans** or ocean shorelines and use it as material for limited collections. Examples are the initiative by denim brand G-Star – “Raw for the Oceans” – in partnership with “Bionic Yarn” aims to produce jeans from recycled ocean plastics.¹⁶ Sportswear brand adidas and environmental initiative “Parley of the oceans” have released the first batch of running shoes in 2016 with uppers made using recycled plastics recovered from the sea.¹⁷ Fully recyclable sporting goods – especially shoes made from many components – are future projects for adidas and other sportswear brands, but are still in a nascent stage.

Greenpeace will continue to look closely at alternative paths - and at an alternative future for fashion that endures, but is radically changed and does not cost the earth. A future for fashion that is more inclusive, less resource-consumptive, less socially destructive and geared towards better quality.

¹³ <http://www.tomcridland.com/collections/the-30-year-sweatshirt>

¹⁴ <https://www.nudiejeans.com/page/this-is-nudie-jeans>

¹⁵ ReFashioned: Cutting-Edge Clothing from Upcycled Materials, 2013 by Sass Brown and Natalie Chanin, <http://www.ecofashiontalk.com/>

¹⁶ https://www.g-star.com/en_gb/corporate/responsibility/news/raw-for-the-oceans-production-process.htm

¹⁷ <http://www.adidas-group.com/en/media/news-archive/press-releases/2015/adidas-and-parley-oceans-stop-industrys-waiting-game/>