

F(t)FF

Fashion (textile) facts and fun



Photo: Unsplash

FOCUS

The battle against volume

In recent decades, the textile industry has boomed. Millions of garments are produced annually despite there being enough clothes for six generations already on Earth. The textile industry accounts for approximately 10 percent of global emissions, not even factoring in the amount of water and chemicals needed for production. It's bad. However, many in the industry welcome new EU directives with stringent regulations, and increasing initiatives from businesses, NGOs, and research makes it easier to imagine a transformation.

"The 'magic' of consumption needs to be broken, and resources need to be made visible"

Philip Warkander

The elephant in the room is still volume. How can we be persuaded to reduced clothing production? And why do we need to buy less?

The initiative *Fashion (Textile) Facts and Fun*¹ held a seminar on the theme. Gabriella Wulff, Doctor of Business Administration, is working at the Swedish School of Textiles at the University of Borås. Malva Carlsson, sustainability coordinator at Houdini Sportswear, and Philip Warkander, writer, author, and fashion historian, gave us three different perspectives on the issue.

Gabriella discussed mass personalization as an alternative to reducing volumes. It means tailoring offers and products to the individual. Garments are customised, and even the experience of the garment is personalised in stores. Initially, the option would target a premium customer group and then the general public. With mass personalization, the customer would have the opportunity to be active and participatory. But it does not come without risks. Gabriella highlighted privacy concerns related to the data required. And is the availability of personalized products truly a necessity, or does it perhaps only create new needs? According to Wulff, circular alternatives are not enough; first and foremost, we need to reduce the use of new materials. Only then, circular initiatives become part of the solution.

Malva from Houdini talked about how they work on creating relationships rather than transactions. Their products have multiple purposes. With ten pieces of clothing, you can do everything. Climb, ski, go to a wed-

ding, work, Houdini's "Live large with less challenge".

Malva also advocates for creativity, desire, and forward-thinking and how through that, new ways of thinking can be created, which we really need. And perhaps most importantly, working on designing for Houdini's fundamental design principles strengthens this argument in the Designer's Checklist:

"Does this product deserve existence? Will it last long enough? Is it versatile enough? Will it age with beauty? Anything added that isn't needed? Will it be easy to repair? Is it durable enough for our rental program? Does it have an end-of-life solution?"

A garment can be timeless and never go out of fashion. "Live large with less," it's okay for a garment to have its years and to be used for many purposes.

Philip began his historical discussion by comparing the late 1800s to today. Back then, a person's clothing was often included in the estate inventory, textiles were valuable, and garments were few. Today, just over 100 years later, clothes are used half as often and stay in the closet on average for 2.5 years. Clothing consumption has increased by 60% in the last 15 years, and prices are dropping.

He went through four industrial revolutions and how they have affected textile production and consumption today. In the 1700s, the textile industry was mechanized, in the 1800s it was electrified. Around 1970, it became automated, and today much is about AI, quantum theory and the Internet of Things. Technological innovations are changing production capabilities, volumes,

and interacting with consumption culture.

Large scale clothing production has created a new consumption pattern as seen in the fast fashion culture. Today, there is a lot of talk about the fashion and textile transformation, new laws and directives are on the way, but fashion is a consumer-driven industry, and consumers don't seem to want to stop shopping! New tech innovations and supply chains enable even more shopping, which makes consumers think even less about the production chain – the focus is still on the product.

Philip argues that we should teach young consumers to think of fashion as objects with value if we are to reduce consumption and connect consumption with production. Look at how the development has been with food. Eco, shop locally, less meat and more of other things. Something similar needs to happen with fashion and textiles. How long does it take for cotton fibres to grow? How much water is needed? The "magic" of consumption needs to be broken, and resources need to be made visible.

In the long run, current consumption culture should be challenged, says Philip. But the question is too important to be left to consumers' lack of engagement; therefore, there should be legislation against environmentally harmful and linear business models.

Mass personalization, design, knowledge, and new regulations. The battle against volumes continues.

¹ <https://www.businessregiongoteborg.se/>

INTERVIEW

Karolina Kling

ARTIST AND PRINT LEAD AT MONKI

Hi Karolina, tell us what you do? I work as a Print Lead at Monki. It means that I'm responsible for the print image, setting trends and direction and leading a team that develops prints. Before this, I worked as a print designer for about 15 years. I also work as an artist with various art and interior design projects. So, you could say I have both a commercial side and an artistic side, quite different from each other.

There's a lot of focus on volumes in the fashion industry. How do you feel about that? It's something I struggle with. It's complicated to work in an industry and for a company that contributes to the problem of producing even more clothes for an already full market (do we really need more clothes?). There's a great deal of shame associated with working in the fashion industry today as well, especially with fast fashion. There's an ethical dilemma that many designers struggle with. Can you stand behind the decisions made by the company you work for? Do I see this just as a job, and do I want to support the company's policies and ethical choices? There's a lot of difficult and relevant questions.

And the major issue is, of course, how to take care of the large volumes that we produce and finding new business models that make us earn more by producing less. I believe we can and that's hopeful.

Does it affect you in your "job brief"? To be honest, in my daily job I'm not so affected by it. My job is to lead my team and create beautiful prints that sell. The volume in which each item is produced is discussed very little. That's a discussion with planners and controllers. I try to focus on why I'm there and make my job as enjoyable and creative as possible and learn as much as I can.

Do you feel that you and your team can influence for less volumes? We are there to design clothes that our customers want to buy. If we succeed, they buy it; if we don't, there's a lot of clothes left sitting in a warehouse, which nobody wants. What we're working on now is really scrutinizing each piece of



Photo: Karolina Kling

clothing and being much more critical than before. Is it good enough? Can we make it better? Is it truly a garment that needs to be in the collection?

Before we thought differently but it's all changing for the better, I think. And we've reduced both the size of the collection and the volume to avoid overproduction. But to answer your question, when it comes to volume and how much is produced, it's the designers belief plus the purpose of the style plus controllers and planners calculations that decide.

But the aim and drive long term is for higher volume (if it sells) as that shows a success in the product.

What about motivation, does it change when knowing it all? It's a good question, I think about that a lot myself. For me there are two kinds of motivation. One when doing my own projects and another when working for a large company with a commercial focus. With the right balance the two can give each other a lot. I've always felt motivated and enthus-

iastic about working and love seeing people in my prints, especially the really old prints knowing a person kept it safe and loved it (or bought second hand) for a long time. That keeps me going and happy.

I find my job at Monki fun and rewarding but I also need to have small projects that I can control and where I don't have to relate to anyone else or think about how or if it will sell. When having creativity as a job I think you need to try to set the right conditions for yourself as much as you can and as much it's possible.

And last one! Fashion is also fun. It's expression, identity and contexts. Is it still there? I think it's still there! If I look at it in a bigger picture, I think it's more creative and fun than in a long time. The way second hand has such a big part of how we dress and style right now feels really creative. You just have to look beyond the "Stockholm stil" trend!



Photo: Unsplash

FACTS

Current updates on Textile Waste

From January 1st 2025, there are new requirements for sorting and separating collection of textile waste from households and businesses.¹ If businesses have textile waste that falls within the definition of municipal waste, it should be deposited into the municipality's collection system.²

However, if the business wishes to collect and manage textile waste independently, they should contact the responsible administration in their home municipality. In Gothenburg, it is Sandra Alm at Sustainable Waste and Water (Kretslopp och vatten). Some businesses handle waste that is not

municipal waste, such as waste from textile manufacturing or wholesalers. In such cases, they are free to contract private entrepreneurs for transporting and managing the textile waste.³

In the long run, it's uncertain how responsibility for the collection will be structured. It may not always stay with the local authorities. The only thing we know today is what we hear from the EU, which can be summed up briefly as cooperation.⁴

Regardless of how it turns out, a fundamental principle is to follow to the general considerations of the Environmental Protection

Act⁵ which essentially is all about leaving as little waste behind as possible. Experiences from packaging recycling - especially plastic packaging recycling, which precedes textiles - indicate that efficient material recycling takes time to develop. A system for recycling needs to be easy to understand, accessible and incentivising for households. In the end it comes down to behavioural change in the whole value chain.

¹ <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/vagledning-och-stod/avfall/krav-pa-separat-insamling-av-textilavfall/>

² <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/vagledning-och-stod/avfall/krav-pa-separat-insamling-av-textilavfall/>

³ <https://www.naturvardsverket.se/vagledning-och-stod/avfall/krav-pa-separat-insamling-av-textilavfall/>

⁴ EUR-Lex - 52023PC0420 - EN - EUR-Lex (<http://www.europa.eu>)

⁵ The Environmental Code (1998:808) | Sveriges riksdag (<http://www.riksdagen.se>)

INSPIRATION

Come rain or shine!

A flood of initiatives and facts on how the fashion and textile industry will handle upcoming EU directives, greenwashing, reduced volumes, etc is pouring in. Initiatives and ambitions from others in and around the industry are also many. Some figures indicates that there are quite a few conscious consumers that are also keeping up. In Swedish Commerce Pre Loved-indicator¹ from April, second hand fashion sales generated SEK 465 million. Fashion sales have increased every month since last November. Although the proportion of consumers who buy second hand has been relatively stable, the average purchase amount has increased slightly, which contributes to the overall in-

crease in sales value.

New business models for both sales and circulation of clothes and textiles are emerging here and there. In The New Cotton Project², 12 actors have joined forces with the ambition to try to come up with a circular model for commercial regenerated cotton production from post-consumer textiles. The project has recently come to an end after a little over three years and some of the key findings are that circularity starts with the design process, the need to build a scalable sorting and recycling infrastructure and citizen communication and engagement activities.³

Artists and creators who want to move forward with strong values in climate, identity,

and expression are creating their own networks and gaining attention through, among others, the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.⁴ Actress Angelina Jolie's initiative Atelier Jolie⁵ is a global network where creators with different backgrounds focus on collaboration, learn from each other, and most of all, "have fun". In the UK, there's The Institute of Positive Fashion⁶ which celebrates the industry's best practices and encourages future business decisions to create positive change in the fashion industry, and in West Sweden, several actors are behind the transformation and collaboration project known as Textile Movement.⁷

All in all, it will happen, come rain or shine!

¹ <https://www.svenskhandel.se/rapporter/pre-loved-indikatorn-april-2024>

² <https://newcottonproject.eu>

³ <https://www.theindustry.fashion/>

⁴ <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/>

⁵ <https://www.atelierjolie.com/>

⁶ <https://instituteofpositivefashion.com/About-IPF>

⁷ <https://textilemovement.com/en/>

Further reading

Key takeaways from the British Fashion Council's fourth annual Institute of Positive Fashion Forum

Berlin Fashion Week adopts CPHFW's sustainability requirements

Open call New Order of Fashion

France taxes fast fashion clothing

Future adaptive design for a circular economy, Rise

Redesigning the future of Fashion, Ellen MacArthur Foundation

ABOUT

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