



**NOW IS THE TIME FOR  
INNOVATION ON A MASSIVE  
SCALE IN ORDER TO MAKE  
SUSTAINABILITY THE NEW  
STANDARD ACROSS THE ENTIRE  
FASHION INDUSTRY. THAT IS  
THE MESSAGE COMMUNICATED  
BY INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS  
DURING THE FOURTH EDITION  
OF THE COPENHAGEN FASHION  
SUMMIT. SO WHEN WILL WE  
WAKE UP AND TRANSFORM THE  
WORLD'S SECOND DIRTIEST  
INDUSTRY INTO A SYSTEM THAT  
ALL OF ITS SUBCONTRACTORS,  
AND ABOVE ALL OUR PLANET,  
CAN SUSTAIN?**



# THE SUMMIT

THE COPENHAGEN FASHION SUMMIT DEFINES THE FUTURE OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION

## **Towards a collaborative industry**

Will the Copenhagen Fashion Summit become “the Davos of the fashion industry,” focusing on the topic of sustainable innovation? Many of the industry leaders assembled in the Danish capital weighed in on the discussions that took place. As remarked by Lewis Perkins, President of Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute, a nonprofit organization devoted to product innovation: the technology, innovation, experts, and designers are there, ready to restart the fashion system. So when can we expect to see an “intense collaboration” and a common “investment” to create a responsible ecosystem? In fact, in terms of laying the groundwork for a circular economy encompassing collection design, sub-contracting, and recycling, he concludes: “none of that will be accomplished by a single brand, but by the entire industry.”

A massive overhaul of the fashion industry’s manufacturing processes is possible. That is the opinion of Rick Ridgeway, Vice President of Public Engagement at Patagonia. Interest in reducing environmental impact and managing the social justice issues tied to fashion production lines has indeed grown with the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) and the Higg Index, created by Patagonia and retailer Wal-Mart. Meetings were also held on the sidelines of the summit with another industry alliance, Planet Textiles, while the first Educators Summit brought together a host of fashion schools. Though companies have shown a real drive to effect change in the fashion system, the scale of these efforts varies widely.

## **Towards new business models**

How does Patagonia’s business model stack up against athletic outfitter Nike? An independent, family-owned business — “and it’s important to specify,” insists Rick Ridgeway — Patagonia blazes a trail of its own, in the image of its founder Yvon Chouinard. Because many fashion companies focus on reducing their carbon footprints without addressing the root of the problem: the industry imperative to keep producing more. Already at the 2014 summit, Vanessa Friedman, Fashion Director and Chief Fashion Critic at the New York Times, called ecological fashion an oxymoron. Ridgeway echoed this loud and clear at this year’s event. Instead of ecological fashion, the industry leaders in attendance talked about “responsible innovation.”

In fact, it is hard to imagine Nike asking its consumers to buy fewer shoes and apparel, as Patagonia did with its anticonsumerist slogan: “Don’t buy this jacket,” first published in the New York Times on Black Friday in 2011. The very next year the company’s profits jumped by 30%. Patagonia continues to embrace the paradox of ecological fashion with panache. Fueled by the spirit of opposition, the capitalist regime has reared back with a vengeance. In that sense, entrepreneurial initiatives abound, notably from H&M, a partner of the summit despite representing fast fashion everywhere around the world. While the group continues to tout its environmental actions, many of its subcontractors still work under perilous conditions, despite the fatal events at Rana Plaza. Livia Firth of Eco-Age has roundly denounced this business model with fervor. Still today, this paradox — or the regeneration of the capitalist fashion system — nevertheless presents an opportunity for any business, including fast fashion companies, to improve one aspect of their production lines. But how can trendsetters and tastemakers do their part to make the fashion industry more responsible?

## **Towards a new model of information and inspiration**

Making responsible fashion an integral part of everyday conversations remains a top challenge. For Shaway Yeh, Editorial Director at Modern Weekly in China, part of the difficulty lies in communicating and showcasing the value of a product’s manufacturing process within a fashion industry dominated by visual culture. “We have too heavily emphasized visual culture (...) Most of the creatives at big fashion houses are image makers.” For Edwina McCann, Editor-in-Chief of Vogue Australia, the industry needs to revise its standards of what constitutes “good design,” challenge the throwaway culture of consumerism, and think about how to value the work of studios. That’s what Project Renaissance, led by Bandana Tewari, Fashion Features Director at Vogue India, has managed to pull off with success. As she explains, the project restored the connection between the visual culture of the fashion industry and the artisanal culture of her country. Skilled Indian artisans and international fashion brands teamed up to craft unique pieces and fashion features for the magazine’s community. Narratives focused on responsible fashion, insists Bandana Tewari, can spark powerful stories within the context of social media and the behind-the-scenes culture they enable. “Everything doesn’t need to be ugly; there are billions of stories that should be highlighted.”

“It’s time for a shift. It’s our responsibility in the media to educate people that good design is sustainable design,” states Imran Amed, founder and CEO of the Business of Fashion media outlet. As he concludes: “I get a bit frustrated with all this thinking that sustainability is a secondary thing, and it shouldn’t be a secondary thing anymore.” A call echoed by the Youth Fashion Summit for the benefit of every industry professional in attendance. Responsible fashion is not only a vital concern for the planet and the industry’s subcontractors, but also for the next generation of fashion professionals.

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