

Sustainable Fashion: Limiting a Singularity -Advanced Glossary to an Article

Edit Csanák DLA

Senior Lecturer, Óbuda University Sándor Rejtő, Faculty of Light Industry and Environmental Engineering, Institute of Product Design, HUNGARY

Received: November 05, 2018; Accepted: November 16, 2018; Published: November 21, 2018

***Corresponding author:** : Edit Csanák DLA, Óbuda University Sándor Rejtő Faculty of Light Industry and Environmental Engineering, Institute of Product Design, 1034 Budapest, Doberdó út 6. HUNGARY, Email: csanak.edit@rkk.uni-obuda.hu

Abstract

The paper "Eco-friendly Concepts and Ethical Movements in the Fashion Industry", seeking to explore the history and application of the eco-friendly concepts and sustainable design in fashion, was published as a conference paper, in 2014. It aimed to introduce the rise of the idea of sustainability in the Fashion World and to draw attention to the core values of the movement. Despite its limitations, it certainly proved to be a useful source for many authors given a large number of visitors. In this article, the Author supplements the original text with information and ideas arisen from further examination of the concept and current tendencies of the sustainable fashion. Highlighting the major organizations of this world-wide movement which cannot be ignored by any fashion professional, this paper attempts to underline some not enough discussed aspects of the movement growing hand-in-hand parallel with it. The article attempts to highlight the matter of consumer habits as a core issue in making the fashion more sustainable.

Keywords: sustainable fashion; education; consumer habits; pillars of sustainability;

Introduction

Fashion faced a nasty reputation these days. Those who work in fashion, love it and do not want clothes to exploit people or destroy the planet. Advanced thinkers demand radical change seeking ways to draw attention that something went wrong, and has to change. Over the thirty years, past from the first movements appeared, seems to be not changed much; the responsibility of the brands and designers is unquestionable in this matter.

Respected fashion theorist, Li Edelkoort, gave a provocative talk on the stage, sharing her opinions on why the fashion system is destroyed, and how the industry cannot catch up to today's reality regaining its real value [1]. Icon, Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons 'withdrew' from fashion by the manifest Not Making Clothes, in 2017 [2]. Recovering the structure of the Fashion Industry became a crucial issue of the global economy. One of the objectives is slowing down the processes in the standard rate of

growth (Slow Fashion). However, there are more goals, as natural: protecting the environment, dealing with the recycling and waste, encouraging the development of environmentally friendly materials, fight for fair trade and decent working conditions, support of the traditional skills and protection of the heritage, supply chain management, and enforcement of the application of animal-welfare directives.

Are these noble goals designed to reduce the environmental footprint of the garment to be compatible with the interests of the Fashion Industry? Can they be applied consequently? Can this hectic phenomenon, driven by the eternal transformation, be tamed and compelled? Can fashion ever be sustainable? These concerns are to be discussed in this article.

Sustainable Fashion: Analysis of the concept, rise of the movement and intentions

By the commonly used definition, under the concept of Sustainable Fashion, we consider the processes where the fashion products are created and produced with social responsibility, in respect of the environmental and social impact of the garment. The main aim of sustainable fashion is to reduce the carbon footprint of the second dirtiest industry in the world [3]. However, if analyzed in depth, the often used concept 'sustainable fashion' seems to be a conceptual disorder.

Sustainable Fashion: A conceptual disorder?

Sustainable is considered something able to be continued over a period. In the environmental aspect, it is something causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time. These aspects have never been adopted by the mechanism of fashion as a phenomenon, as they do not serve the basis for behavioral patterns that are needed to create 'new fashion' (new style, new trend).

Fashion is considered *as a temporarily dominant direction of custom style, otherwise: a popular or the latest style of clothing,*

hair, decoration, or behavior, a manner of doing something. Only appearances that spread massively can come into fashion. Slow and sustainable operation have not ever been the interest of Fashion, as contrary to the phenomenon, fundamentally operating in a significant number of occurrences of new styles,

and their fast spread. This premier cultural singularity – product and materialization of the human fantasy –, is working according to the rules of the cultural phenomena, but capable of swings unable to predict. Figure 1 contributes to better understanding of its mechanism.

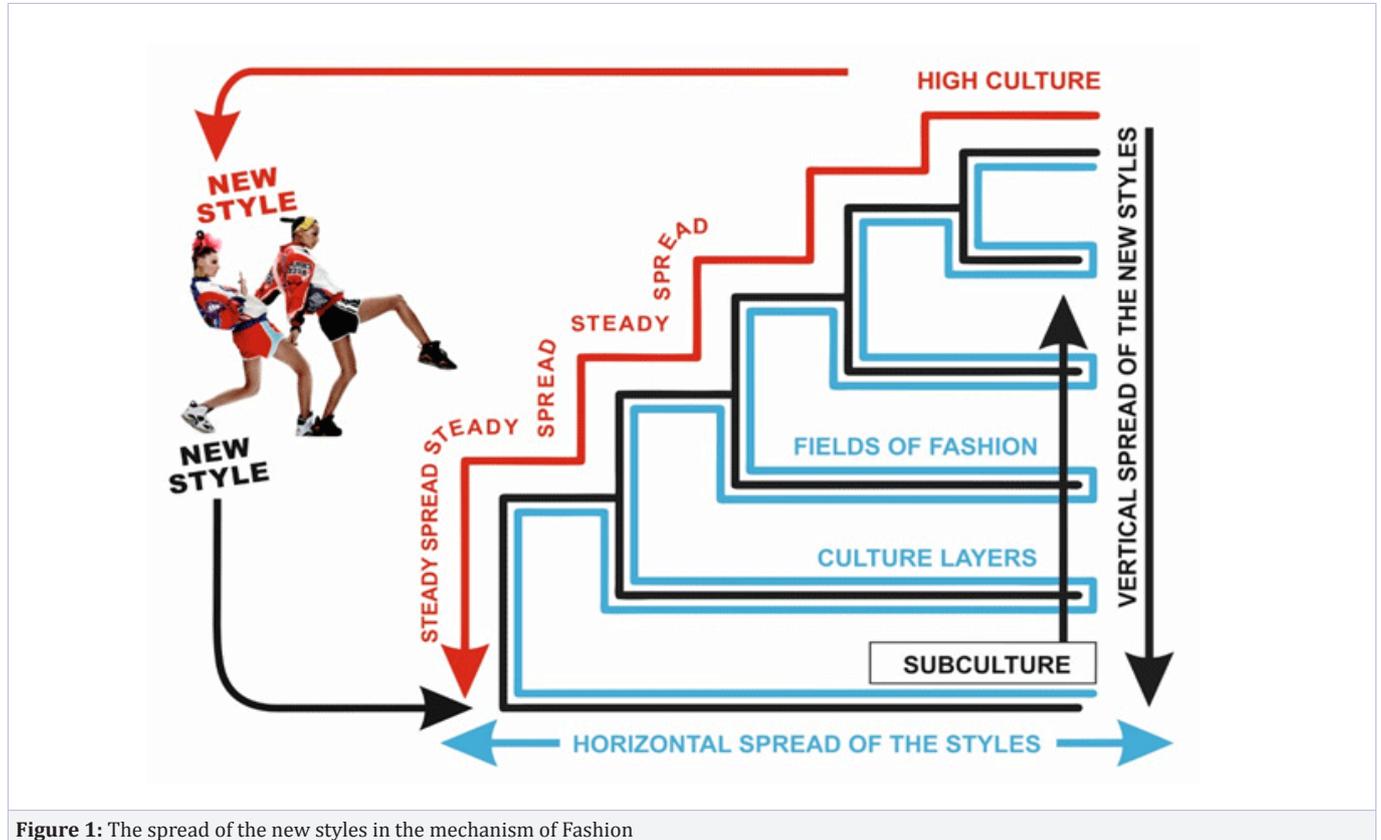


Figure 1: The spread of the new styles in the mechanism of Fashion

Culture, as *the continuously evolving dynamic interaction of mindsets and gut-sets of actors in the system(s)*, has many points of attachment to sustainability (cultural sustainability). For fashion, it means that the cultural commitment of the designers and brands to sustainability is to create volumes with consideration of their responsibility for sustaining or continuing one's tradition, heritage, craftsmanship, method, and identity – as a part of this value. These issues, are humanistic endeavors, which unfortunately have again, nothing to do with Fashion, as a phenomenon.

Sustainable Fashion fights for goals which are to be challenged to pacify with the mechanism of the phenomenon continuously seeking change and a new style. In a nutshell, it is a kind of ambition to force the wolf not to eat the lamb. It does not mean that making the fashion world sustainable is not a cheerful endeavor or a goal to fight for. Slow Fashion is one of the solutions, yet again completely different to the interest of the global Fashion Industry. Analyses prove that the production of fashion goods is continuously growing [4, 5]. To keep up, nowadays companies are inventing advanced solutions in order to manage their result-oriented PLMs successfully.

Fashion cannot be sustained, but fashion products can be made sustainable. This alteration in interpretation makes a difference between real and nominal goals. *What is Sustainable Fashion then about: Is it a long-lasting movement? An approach? A kind of attitude? Or a true, humanistic endeavor resulting in a new pose; a new manner of making Fashion.*

The Rise Of The Sustainable Fashion Movement

Regarding the evolution of sustainability, it is important to highlight the radical change of the market, around 2007, when Fashion faced a new phenomenon: Fast Fashion. Its greatest support was the growing e-commerce. Ones might guess, but no way to predict, how tremendous impact these will have. The first complex writing, which analyzed the new channel on the market in the aspect of sustainability was published a year before in contribution of the few authors [6].

Fast Fashion has accelerated the consolidation of the sustainability trend, increasing the number of movements, associations and their contributors. The year 2013 was crucial in the unification of the forces by the Fashion Revolution movement, in response to the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh.

Table 1 highlights the essential actors of the global Sustainable Fashion Scene who were consequently disseminating the idea of sustainability organizing online courses, panel discussions, webinars, fashion fairs, and training for start-up fashion brands.

Still: operation of each organization lays on corporate principles and cost-effectiveness. Each event organized was/is just another form of the fashion business.

Table 1: Sustainable Fashion actors with the year and location of the establishment

YEAR	ORGANIZATION	LOCATION
1987	EPEA (Environmental Protection Encouragement Agency)	Deutschland
1989	Clean Clothing Campaign	Bangladesh
1995	Verite	France
1996	TED (Textile Environment Design)	United Kingdom
1998	Ethical Trading Initiative	United Kingdom
2002	Ethical Company Organisation	United Kingdom
2006	Ethical Fashion Forum	United Kingdom
2007	Fashion Takes Action	Canada
2008	National Association of Sustainable Fashion Designers (SFD)	United States
2009	Eco Age	United Kingdom
2009	Ethical Fashion Initiative	NA
2009	Sustainable Apparel Coalition	United States
2014	Fashion Revolution	United Kingdom
2016	Mistra Future Fashion	Sweden

The Business Of Sustainable Fashion

The rise of sustainable fashion increased the number of supporting organizations, what contributed to the consolidation of a new form of flourish fashion businesses; ones discovered the potentials, and start to make their business tagging 'sustainability' as a label on their events, services, and products, what become a tool of the PR. The number of so-called sustainable and ethical brands significantly increased, and the market became flooded with products crafted ethically or made in an eco-friendly manner. Fashion World soon faced: the successful application of the objectives does not depend on the enthusiasm of the passionate.

The fact that customers cannot trace the supply chain of brands arose some accreditation organizations willing to certify the clarity the brand and quality of the product, and claiming that fashion can be sustained only by consistent quality control. Referring to a survey made in 2017, which monitored the purchase habits of the fashion and textile market consumers by focusing on the Millennials, 60 percent of them are interested in certified sustainable clothing, and 69 percent check for 'environmentally friendly' or 'sustainable' label when buying clothes [7]. "Sustainability will be the next major battlefield where brands will compete for millennial spend" [8]. Other sources attempted to examine the relationships between product- and store-related attributes of eco-fashion, and consumption decisions of the fashion consumers, investigating their affiliation to the premium level eco-fashion, known as a less price-sensitive segment of the market [9]. According to this research, an existing, measurable segment of customers is intended to buy a good quality product from a trusted manufacturer, willing to pay more.

As a result of the harming processes, an "evidence" became required to guarantee a decent product. The preparation of such certificates involves expensive procedures; as a result, brands that do not know how to bear such costs, but although "clean", will be lagging. So, this is the state of fashion; once it was not needed to prove fairness and professionalism.

Sustainable Fashion Education

Along with the rise of the trend, the number of schools offering custom courses also increased. The education of young professionals seemed to be the most important field of acting. The first college courses were set around 2008-2010. However, quoting Li Edelkoort the fashion world is still working in a 20th-century mode celebrating the individual [5]. Training of brands proved to be another, much more lucrative field.

After some years of debate, brands faced that sustainable issues cannot be treated well without fulfillment of the formidable task: the education of the customers to change the consumer habits. The objective to buy less, and choose durable, requires a willingness to pay the real cost of the garment. The objective to habituate the customer to learn about the brand (whose products buying) can be successfully realized in the medium or high category, and in case of the premium products. For mass products, considered a significant part of the market and proven held responsible for environmental pollution, product history is hardly traceable.

The Diagram Of Sustainable Fashion

The three pillars of sustainable development are economic growth, ecological balance, and social progress. The economic growth and ecological aspects were in focus of research, while the social pillar has received less attention – until recently [10]. Now a great emphasis has been placed on social issues, however: still not enough.

Due to the radical change of the consumption channels, and altered habits, the three-pillar diagram of sustainability in fashion, introduced in the referenced article [11], has to be completed with a new element: the consumer habits. As the fourth pillar of sustainability – the fourth bubble of the diagram – they make the pillars stable. Even considering them as part of the economic and social conditions, in interaction with the environmental aspects, they have an influence on the ecological balance, and can be analyzed and measured as a single unit, as shown in Figure 2.

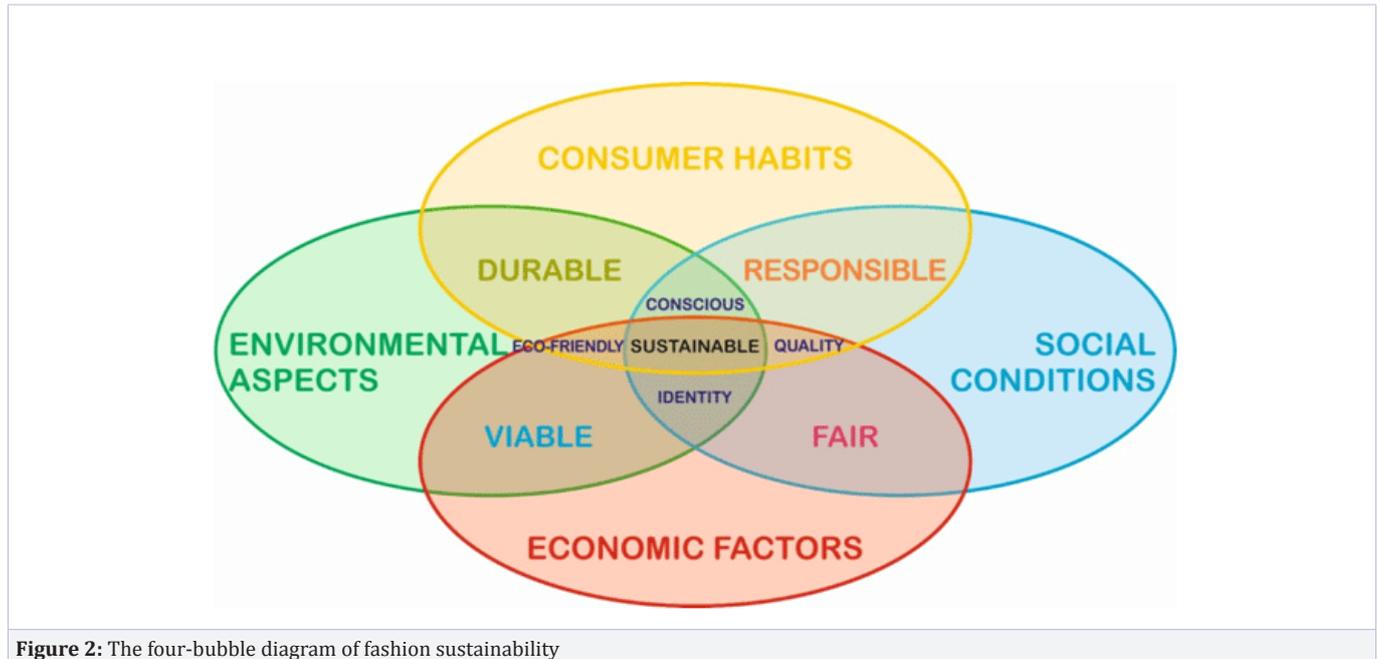


Figure 2: The four-bubble diagram of fashion sustainability

The discussion of the specific interactions within the diagram is a topic for further examination and extensive research.

Discussion and summary of the main findings

Saving a planet and eco-awareness are specific issues prompting every decent human on solidarity and action, something that many people believe in and are passionate about. Sustainable fashion, as a global movement, mobilizing large forces of the industry, and by today's idea integrated into the production process of fashion goods, raised plenty of organizations, events, consulting companies, and associations during its three-decade evolution. In part, it became a form of flourishing business, giving work to many intellectuals who are 'attempting to make visible change' - but are rotating the same wheel. Since the rebellion along which the movement was created is a product of Fashion, it is now the fashion mechanism itself that serves the spread of the movement and acceleration of the trend.

As the essence of fashion is the continuous change, factually excluding the principle of sustainability, aspirations to create and manufacture garments and accessory in a sustainable way are objectives which can form a massive platform able to result in visible change but can be hardly adopted by the Fashion. Recent sources trying to sum the players, initiatives, apparatuses,

standard systems, and strategies, however, are highlighting the lack of transparency and control of the complex supply chain, finding it essential management and governance challenges of the future fashion business [12].

The successful application of the objectives rests in a big deal on the decision of the consumer: if strongly opposed to the consumption of non-quality goods, and willing to pay the real cost of the product, fashion will start to realize the sustainable goals by itself. When eco-consciousness, quality-oriented and eco-friendly attitudes perform as a mass trend, the spread of the sustainability will fulfil as a consequence of the new mindset. Until other tendencies are feeding the mechanism (Fast Fashion, mass market), it remains a long-term fight to win the battle.

References

1. The Business of Fashion. Anti-Fashion: A Manifesto for the Next Decade. Voices: Li Edelkoort. [cited 2018 Oct 8]; Available from: www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV3djdXfml
2. Woo K. Remembering One of Rei Kawakubo's Most Boundary-Breaking Shows. [cited 2018 October 12]; Available from: www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/t-magazine/fashion/rei-kawakubo-not-making-clothes-oral-history.html

3. Sweeny G. Fast Fashion Is the Second Dirtiest Industry in the World, Next to Big Oil. [cited 2018 Oct 8]; Available from: www.ecowatch.com/fast-fashion-is-the-second-dirtiest-industry-in-the-world-next-to-big-1882083445.html
4. The Business of Fashion, & McKinsey & Company. The State of Fashion 2018. [cited 2018 Oct 10]; Available from: www.cdn.businessoffashion.com/reports/The_State_of_Fashion_2018_v2.pdf
5. The Business of Fashion, & McKinsey & Company. The State of Fashion 2017. [cited 2018 Oct 10]; Available from: www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Industries/Retail/Our%20Insights/The%20state%20of%20fashion/The-state-of-fashion-2017-McK-BoF-report.ashx
6. Ashworth CJ, Schmidt RA, Pioch E, Hallsworth A. An approach to sustainable 'fashion' e-retail: A five-stage evolutionary strategy for 'Clicks-and-Mortar' and 'Pure-Play' enterprises. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*. 2006;13(4):289-299. doi: 10.1016/j.jretconser
7. Müller H. The Key To Confidence: Millennials, Parents, and Textile Sustainability. [cited 2018 October 10]; Available from: https://www.oeko-tex.com/en/ot_press/newsroom_1/pressdetailpage_168769.html?excludeld=168769
8. Hahn-Petersen LA. Millennials Say They Care About Sustainability. So, Why Don't They Shop This Way? [cited 2018 October 15] Available from: Business of Fashion: www.businessoffashion.com/articles/opinion/op-ed-millennials-say-they-care-about-sustainability-so-why-dont-they-dont-shop-this-way
9. Wong WY, Chang T-y. The consumption side of sustainable fashion supply chain: Understanding fashion consumer eco-fashion consumption decision. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*. 2012;16(2):193-215. doi: 10.1108/13612021211222824
10. Stigson B. Sustainable development and business. *OECD Observer*. 2000: 221/222.
11. Csanák E. Eco-Friendly Concepts and Ethical Movements in The Fashion Industry. In: Zvonko, Dragcevic, editor. *Proceedings of the 7th International Textile, Clothing & Design Conference: Magic World of Textiles*; 2014; 5-8; Dubrovnik, Croatia. Zagreb: University of Zagreb; 553-558.
12. Schneider AM, Jastram S. Introduction to Sustainable Fashion Governance. In: Sarah Jastram, Anna-Maria Schneider, editors. *Sustainable Fashion. Governance and New Management Approaches*. Berlin: Springer International Publishing; 2018, 3-8.
13. Gwilt A. *A Practical Guide to Sustainable Fashion*. New York: Fairchild Books; 2014.
14. Boyd C. Sustainability is good business. *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. The OECD Observer*. 2001;228(3):35-37.
15. Von Furstenberg D, Hoffman L. *FutureFashion White Papers. Earth Pledge Series on Sustainable Development*. New York: Earth Pledge Foundation; 2008.
16. Sullivan R. Stream of Conscience. [cited 2014 June 30]; Available from: <http://www.archive.vogue.com/Desktop/#/20050301/524>
17. UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) *Global Chemicals Outlook: Towards Sound Management of Chemicals*; 2013. In: Kempf E, editor. Report ISBN: 978-92-807-3320-4, Contract No.: DTI/1639/GE