

SUSTAINABILITY REQUIRES A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER AND MULTI-CHANNEL APPROACH

If we talk about responsible fashion, everyone says they are enthusiastic, but translating this feeling into concrete actions is complex. The best way forward is establishing cooperation between the players in the supply chain, including buyers who organized the #FashionForPlanet talks in Milan

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The Fashion Pact signed in September 2019 in Paris by a group of fashion companies led by Kering committed to protecting the climate, biodiversity and oceans is a noble but abstract plan, said Italian fashion buyers at the #FashionForPlanet conferences. The trade association Camera Buyer Italia gathered representatives from brands, showrooms, academics, consultants and analysts for two talks about sustainable fashion and its impact on the evolution of the buying business. The event was hosted in Milan by Wsm Fashion Reboot. "Buyers travel around the globe for fashion weeks: we could start by taking a look at this aspect of the profession, creating a new set of rules for a greater sustainability when we make purchases," said Camera Buyer Italia President Francesco Tombolini. Another starting point could be for buyers to adopt common guidelines for what defines a sustainable store now being drawn up by Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, a trade group made up of Italy's top fashion houses, with research center for applied sustainability **Goldmann & Partners**. "I want to push for the application of these guidelines," said Camera della Moda President Carlo Capasa in his speech. Founder and CEO of Busnelli Corporate Andrea Busnelli seemed optimistic about the concept of a sustaina-

DEPARTMENT STORES PLAN TO DOUBLE THE SUSTAINABLE FASHION RANGE

ble store. "In the future it will be possible to create a completely recycled shop," said this maker of custom furniture. "In ancient Rome, buildings were built by recycling the shards of amphorae. Today fashion brands do not use recycled building materials, because they and builders are unaware of new materials, or simply because they are in a hurry to open." Busnelli sees the store of the future as a "museum" space, where shoppers can discover new trends and view capsule collections, with a comfort zone and dressing rooms that tell the story of the garments through infographics, and explain what happens to them after you are finished wearing them. Which brings us to the topic

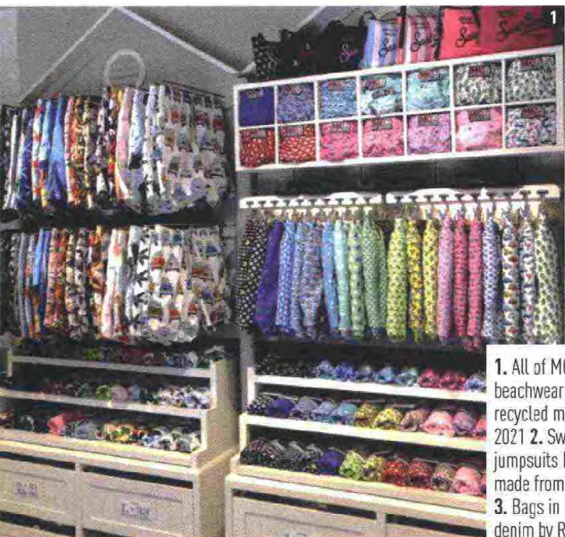


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1. To combat climate change, Timberland wants to plant 26,000 trees in Ghana, north of the Daka River 2. One of the talks organized last January by Camera Buyer Italia during the WSM Fashion Reboot

of products. According to McKinsey's Global Sustainability Report 2019, buyers from the world's best-known department stores say they plan to double the percentage of sustainable purchases in five years, from a current 23% to 42%. Some companies have long been gearing up for increased demand for sustainable products. For example, VF Corporation, which owns brands like The North Face, Timberland and Vans, began to worry about environmental impact nine years ago. It has created three sustainability pillars for its business. "The first pillar is the circular economy which means among things, for some brands, the customer can try out the product before buying, with the option of returning it. Then we have 'take back,' where the brand recycles a garment and resells it. We also carry out targeted training for our product development staff," said Anna Maria Rugarli, the group's EMEA sustainability director. "Scale for good" is the second pillar, which is a commitment to protect people (in terms of dignity, health and well-being) and the planet from risks. The third is empowerment, from employees to consumers. Max Ferrari, founder of MC2 Saint Barth, said he aims to make all of the brand's beachwear from recycled and recyclable materials starting from 2021. "The next challenge will



1. All of MC2 Saint Barth beachwear will be in recycled materials from 2021 2. Sweatshirt and jumpsuits Rewoolution, made from merino wool 3. Bags in recycled denim by Regenesi



be to convince the buyer to return the garment after he is done using it for recycling. Let's think about a bonus for buying a new bathing suit to get people back into the store." Another way of getting customers to bring garments back into the store is through personalization. "Allowing a customer to create their own bag right up to the trimmings is very important, and allows the store to focus on the physical relationship with the customer," said Maria Silvia Pazzi, founder and CEO of Regenesi. This brand began a program to "transform waste into beauty" 12 years ago, when there was still no market for this sort of idea in Italy. But sustainability in and of itself is not yet a driver of purchases, said Luca Martines from Rewoolution, Reda textile group's fully traceable technical-sportswear and urbanwear brand. "In our case both wholesalers and consumers are ahead of the curve in sustainable clothing, but sometimes the shopkeeper is the final consumer and it is difficult to get out of this circle." Even the German market – which is quite evol-

ved in terms of sustainable fashion – has some distance to travel, according to the results of a survey by TextilWirtschaft (owned by Dfv media group, which also publishes Fashion). "From a sample of 290 independent retailers, most say sustainability ranks 5 on a scale of importance from 1 to 10," said journalist Tobias Bayer. "Sixty percent say that they offer sustainable products, which generate 20% of sales on average. However, only 12% of buyers have an in-store expert on the subject." Among customers, 35% ask questions about sustainability. Only 3% of German fashion houses have a Corpo-

IN FRANCE FROM 2023 NO COMPANY COULD DESTROY ITS PRODUCTS

rate Social Responsibility executive, and sustainability is seen above all as an opportunity for advertising. "This can benefit Italian textiles," Bayer noted. "In this sense, the use of common standards could help." Moving to Russia, there is a real responsible interest in fashion from retailers and consumers, but there are plenty of obstacles to overcome. "Retailers prefer to buy without budget guidelines, in order not to have inventory left, while brands impose minimum quantities," said Elena Bugranova, president of the Russian Buyers Union. London showroom RainbowWave's fashion curator and wholesale ambassador Lucia Restelli focused on the topic of minimum orders. "We need minimum order sizes, to guarantee designers that suppliers apply their most affordable prices," she said. RainbowWave has always worked with sustainable brands and, in Restelli's experience, Japanese buyers are among the most loyal. "They are very attentive to the artisanal component. They only buy products for the consumer they know well, and never in large quantities, because they do not want them to go on sale." She believes there will be more interest in sustainable fashion only if a cultural change occurs. Riccardo Grassi, owner of the eponymous

Milanese showroom, sees a future with no distinction between sustainable and non-sustainable fashion: "It might take three, four, or five years but it is possible and it won't take much." He believes the sector is following the footsteps of the organic food industry, and that consumers are more aware of sustainability than buyers, who usually aims for what he thinks will attract "the customer's eye." "The textile makers are the ones who have worked hardest," he said. "The challenge now is to create beautiful proposals in sustainable fabrics." Grassi says there is a priority: "We all have to respect workers: is it more sustainable to worry about a pound of plastic, or a human being?" Bocconi University professor Francesca Romana Rinaldi, author of the new book *Fashion Industry 2030*, talked about a new meaning of sustainability, which implies integrating ethics and aesthetics in the supply chain in a multi-stakeholder and multi-channel perspective. "Otherwise the true meaning of sustainability does not reach the final consumer, who today wants to be involved," she said. PwC senior partner for Fashion & Luxury Nicola Giorgi also put the emphasis on creating a system: "Even Mercedes-Benz and BMW have joined forces to enter the car sharing business. Stella McCartney has created easy-care products, while washing machine manufacturers are concerned about changing the washing methods," he said. The regulatory vacuum remains a problem. But certain countries in Europe can be used as a model. "In France from 2023 no company could destroy its products," said Giorgi. "Sweden offers a tax exemption for responsible companies, and the United Kingdom applies different tax rates according to the fabrics used." Greater clarity when navigating the wide-open sea of certifications would not hurt, especially when a brand deals with the world of finance. "Today everyone is ready to say that sustainability is fantastic, but beyond company narratives, investors want more detail, and they want companies to demonstrate how their way of proceeding is different from the others, as well as what sort of guarantees they give to the consumer," said Bernstein's financial analyst Luca Solca. He expects more investments in production and in suppliers, for greater control of the supply chain, following the example of Hermès, Chanel and Lvmh. As for distribution, according to Solca, sustainability requires at least minimum orders, to avoid waste, and greater transparency on the sale price. "Multibrand stores will always be useful for customers for finding new things. Digital retail is excellent, but only if you already know what you want." ■