

A Short on Sustainable Fashion

The fashion industry is “one of the world’s largest consumer industries, generating €1.5 trillion in annual apparel and footwear revenues in 2016”. (Global Fashion Agenda and The Boston Consulting Group, Inc., 2017)

Rising levels of consumption have the fashion industry resorting to unethical methods, in order to produce more, in a shorter time, for a significant amount less, in attempt to meet the demands of consumers by keeping them interested and purchasing. The fashion industry, although not the most conspicuous, remains a driving force, as a catalyst of economic affluence and a significant employer in many developing countries, it has the ability to manufacture change and to improve social and environmental conditions.

Cotton, a significant textile in the industry, faces an increase in the use of fertilisers – consuming 4% of phosphorous and nitrogen fertilisers globally. Excessive use of these fertilisers could lead to chemical runoff seeping into waterways, resulting in polluted rivers and water systems, impacting human health and ecosystems.

When the moguls of the industry set new trends and persistently introduce fashion cycles, high-street fashion is required to catch up and follow the same concepts by “intensifying business pressures to produce more for less—less time, less money, and less effort.” (The Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company, 2018) with less attention to its detrimental social and environmental effect.

Economic prosperity is remarkable; if the industry becomes sustainable sustainable, but with cracks in the system, factory workers in places like the Philippines or India are still getting paid less than minimum wage, with a

higher non-compliance rate for women. These issues come in abundance, making it less rewarding to see such a booming industry.

With the conversation turning towards sustainability in the fashion industry and communities alike, the world is beginning to see small changes and a growing sense of responsibility. Many fashion companies are beginning to implement change by integrating sustainability into their core product design as well as their manufacturing process, working to hone a completely sustainable business.

In Malta, organisations such as Koperattiva Kummerc Gust are working to make people more conscious through their decisions to purchase and discard, through an Ethical Consumption guide.

“To achieve such radical change, we fully intend to subvert the social order wrought by rampant consumerism. We will replace it with aware, conscious, consumer ethicalism” (slavefreetrade, 2018)

These facts are daunting and often times leave us feeling helpless and powerless. So how can we, as consumers help? Think twice before purchasing, and question how that garment was made, and what impact it has once you buy it.