

The environmental backlash of the glamorous



London Fashion Week

Every year, the flashing lights of the runway and the exhilaration of the shiny and the exciting invade the streets of London. Alongside with Paris, Milan and New York, London is one of the main focuses in the world of glamour and style. However, behind its appealing surface, hides the backlash of it all. Fast-fashion. Year-long trends. The desire for only the new and the latest. They all make the fashion industry one of the most polluting industries in the world, only surpassed by agriculture and fossil fuels.

As a part of the “Big Four”, the London Fashion Week is one of the biggest events in the fashion industry, and every year it hosts over 5,000 enthusiasts, who come together every year to admire the work of over 250 brands and designers. However, studies have shown that, without radical action, by 2050 the global textile industry will be responsible for a quarter of all carbon emissions.

Currently, the linear manufacturing system, together with the promotion of fast and disposable fashion, results in a considerable strain on finite and endangered resources, particularly water. The industry's techniques and materials often contribute to pollution, intensifying global warming. For reference, the production of a pair of jeans produces 25.4 kg of carbon emissions when bought new. A petrol car consumes 170g per passenger and kilometer.

So, as the ceremony reaches its 40-year anniversary, a part of the British public has decided that it's about time they adapt to the modern time. A time where fashion and sustainability cannot be polar opposites.

This past September, a naked protest organized by Gumtree, a company that offers second-hand goods, complained about fashion waste's culture. The protestors, who descended almost naked on the Somerset House, call on the London Fashion Week to show how clothes can be repurposed, and believe that second-hand and recycling are the only way to transform an industry that is currently throwing 140 million pounds of clothing waste into landfill each year.

According to their analysis, 53% of the fashion weeks' 'on the moment' trends will lead to fast fashion waste, and 46% of young adults in the United Kingdom will purchase new clothes as a result of it. A spokesperson from Gumtree stated that they want “world's leading fashion houses and designers to lead the charge and ensure what's trending is sustainable”. The issue now mainly affects younger generations, with 46% of young millennials and gen Z's resorting to high street stores in an attempt to replicate what's displayed in the runways. However, this pressure to purchase is feeding into their climate anxiety, the report also showed. “We have a collective responsibility to put an end to the ‘wear it once’ culture once and for all,” they said.

These petitions aren't unthinkable, as there have already been recent efforts to make fashion events more sustainable. The Copenhagen Fashion Week recently enforced sustainability criteria to be followed by every brand. This action plan obliges brands to follow a minimum of 18 requirements, which cover areas like strategic direction, design, smart material choices, working conditions, consumer engagement and show production. They were first implemented in 2020, but this season – autumn/Winter 2023- is the first time they have been fully implemented. Brenda Otero, journalist specialized in fashion and sustainability, believes that in many cases these restrictions make designers work in a way that favors creativity. "Although these requirements may seem like obstacles, they actually help you find other creative processes and new ways of doing things," she stated. As for ongoing initiatives, she encourages the British Fashion Council to promote the reutilization and recuperation of clothes in clothes production, but also in the organization of runways and events. She adds that in these times, designers might want to rethink their brand, as the words "sustainability" and "environmentally friendly" gain importance exponentially and influence the public opinion.

However, this seems to unrealistic for Samantha Falcone, a make-up artist that has worked long enough in the fashion industry to say that she doesn't see the word "sustainability" anywhere. "Fashion Works because today baggy jeans are trending, but tomorrow they are not. The goal is to sell, and to sell you need to innovate and present new things," she said. She also added that there is more to the backlash of fashion weeks than just clothes. All of the guests' flights, the decoration, plastic wraps that go into the bin straight after. They all add up to an enormous amount of waste in a week that, according to Samantha, is all about "showing off".

Now, consumers are impatient to witness whether or not in the next few years the London Fashion Week will reconsider its principles and walk towards a greener version of itself before the damage is irreversible.