

Clean Fashion Summit: How circular fashion ecosystems are shaping sustainability

From localised ecosystems to shifting habits, Colèchi and guest speakers open up debate on what companies and consumers alike can be doing to implement sustainability.

Research agency Colèchi, a team striving towards sustainable development through their 'Clean Fashion Model', have recently held a talk on sustainable fashion, touching on circular business models and how companies can scale but follow ethical codes.

Kristina Bull, *QSA Partners*, was one amongst the speakers, alongside Lotte Selwood, *Are You Mad*, Shannen Maria Samuel, *Bleaq*, Fiona Uwamahoro, PHD Researcher at LCF and Katy Mason, *Trash Club*.

The concept of circular business models, an idea touched on by all the guest speakers, has been a reoccurring theme throughout this talk. The need for companies to change their actions and embrace recycling is ever-growing, with the fashion industry being the world's second biggest polluter. "Transparency" and the idea of "breaking down the façade" are concepts mentioned, as making consumers aware of how changing ecosystems and business models support sustainability allows mutual growth between the company and the consumer. Allowing customers to connect to their clothing is an ideology *Bleaq* owner, Shannen Maria Samuel, strives towards. Straying away from the "transactional nature" of purchasing clothing is engineered into her brand, as open talks with her customers at her store in Brick Lane about the unique vintage garments they sell are being made, and what the business is doing to drive sustainability forwards. Creating an "accessible space" is also important to Shannen, for both consumers and designers, where garments, and their designers, can be appreciated.

Legislation laws are becoming a significant sustainability drive for large companies, the speakers suggest. "The power between Western and Eastern companies is growing exponentially", and with the fashion industry being minimally legislated, this power must be used by companies to their advantage. "Large brands must be called out for their actions", as appropriate change must be made in the Western world, where overconsumption is highest. Relying on legislation laws has a slow impact on sustainability and waste reduction, especially for large companies; "relying on legislations having an impact, we may not see change for another 10 years", says conscious creative agency co-founder Lotte Selwood, *Are You Mad*. Recycling systems differ all over London and the rest of the UK, she states, never mind globally, "we can't start solving

these issues on a global scale”, change must begin on a “localised scale”, with change starting within boroughs, cities and countries onwards.

Current legislation laws state fashion companies must use up to 30% recycled materials, Lotte continues, although this figure is not adequate and essentially does not have a significant impact in reducing waste. Brands would benefit more from using upwards of 70% recycled materials, although without legislation being an incentive and pushing higher than 30%, many companies decide to do the bare minimum, believing that they are making a change.

“Changing the policy will have a stronghold over brands and changing their habits”, says Lotte, while simultaneously making consumers aware of how they can be a part of that role and having an insight into what companies are doing, which will help consumers adopt the same sustainable mindset.

“In the mean-time we have a crisis of imagination”, she continues, relying on policies and the government for change is not an adequate solution, as local businesses are able to implement change *now*. “Leading by example” is simple and effective, Lotte states, as community led change can be done now, with small businesses enforcing change in order to influence consumers and brands alike.

Having a physical space as a brand may be something of a myth in recent years considering the growth of digital platforms, but many underestimate the importance, the speakers suggest. Creating a space where designers work can be showcased allows consumers to connect to the brand and the clothing displayed, which I’ve learned is important for sustainability to thrive. Showing consumers the process of the brands cyclical nature is significant in an industry that encourages overconsumption; by opening up conversations in a physical space customers become quickly aware of the impact these sustainable brands are having. These conversations are almost “humanising the industry”, as making the process “physically visible” to consumers allows for a more connected community, which cannot be achieved on an online platform. “What you wear is your biggest non-verbal communicator of who you are”, states Katy Mason, co-founder of creative network *Trash Club*. Seeing consumers as people is necessary in forming brand connections, she says; “we are more than just consumption habits”. Opening up a setting promotes a range of questions from consumers, which smaller brands like *Bleaq* benefit from, and allowing them to open up debate with each other helps brands find new ways of being sustainable,

“It’s human nature to want something new... it’s engraved in us”, Lotte Selwood says, although with the growth of sustainable fashion and many brands changing their business models to circular, we are thankfully, changing the narrative. With consumers and brands beginning to stray away from the urge to overconsume we are able to see current change, and are increasingly able to

combat waste in the fashion industry by tackling the major disconnect between the two parties. The future of sustainable fashion and its successes on a global scale is simply a hopeful thought, but localised current changes can be made, so ask yourself, how can you change your own habits?