

Post-Event Reflection: Sustainable Fashion and Textiles Forum Truro



Tuesday 10th September 2024
University of Exeter

* This event was funded by the Entrepreneurial Futures project, a £5.6m investment in research, development and innovation (RD&I) activity for businesses based in Cornwall & Isles of Scilly led by the University of Exeter. This project is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

**Future Fibres
Network+**
FFN+

credit: ian-stevenson.com

Post-Event Reflection: Sustainable Fashion and Textiles Forum Truro

On Tuesday 10th September 2024, we gathered at The Alverton Hotel in Truro for an inspiring and thought-provoking event, in collaboration with the *Future Fibres Network+ project**. This event brought together industry stakeholders to explore shared challenges and foster collaboration toward a more sustainable and circular future for the fashion and textiles sector.

Morning Highlights

The day began with opening remarks by Allen Alexander, Associate Professor in Innovation and Circular Economy at the University of Exeter, who emphasized the urgent need for industry-wide collaboration and innovation to drive circular practices across the fashion supply chain. His words set the tone for a day filled with insightful discussions.

"Circular innovation is not just about redesigning products or processes—it's about fundamentally rethinking how we create value. By embracing circular principles, businesses can unlock new opportunities, reduce waste, and build resilience in a changing market."

(Allen Alexander)

Following the opening, Jenny Valarino, Head of Circular Design at Circular Textiles Foundation, delivered a powerful keynote address. She provided an overview of the current challenges and opportunities in the industry, highlighting the critical role design plays in reducing waste and closing the loop.

Jenny shared her personal journey into sustainable fashion, beginning with her early inspirations drawn from her family's strong repair culture. Fond memories of her mother's handmade clothes and her grandparents' dedication to repurposing and repairing left a lasting impression, shaping her belief in valuing and prolonging the life of garments. Jenny discussed her shift in priorities after returning to work, focusing on sustainability and circularity over aesthetics and press coverage.

She emphasized the importance of designing not just for physical durability, but also emotional durability, where consumers remain connected to and invested in their garments. Jenny also spoke about the CTF's role in translating technical recycling specifications into clear, actionable circular design principles, ensuring that clothing is designed to be recycled at the end of its life. Highlighting their partnerships with recyclers and brands across Europe, she stressed the need for collaboration to close the loop in circular fashion systems, creating a more sustainable future. Jenny concluded by

Post-Event Reflection: Sustainable Fashion and Textiles Forum Truro

noting that while the landscape is evolving, with new recycling technologies and legislation such as EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) and DPP (Digital Product Passport) on the horizon, the greatest opportunities lie in continued partnerships across the industry.

“We translate technical recycler specifications into clear circular design principles. Our vision is a future where clothing and textiles are designed for recyclability as standard practice and no clothing, or textiles ends in landfill or incineration.” (Jenny Valarino)

A dynamic panel discussion followed, featuring experts Sophie Scanlon from WRAP, Cecilia Robson from Lemon Street Studio Ltd, and Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas from the British School of Fashion. The panel explored the diverse perspectives on transitioning toward more circular and sustainable practices in fashion, sparking many insightful contributions from the audience.

Sophie opened the conversation by emphasizing the importance of adopting design principles that prioritize recyclability, durability, and waste reduction. She stressed that for brands to succeed in circular models, design for circularity must be integrated from the very beginning, not as an afterthought. Cecilia Robson, with her extensive hands-on experience creating products from textile waste, shared the opportunity with pre-consumer waste. She demonstrated how designers can reimagine waste materials, transforming them into high-value products, and highlighted the necessity of designing out waste to close the loop in the fashion industry.

Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas brought a cultural perspective to the discussion, stressing the importance of cross-sector collaboration in driving change. She noted that circular fashion isn't just a technical challenge—it also requires understanding cultural contexts and working across industries to achieve broader sustainability goals. Natascha highlighted the key role of education and awareness campaigns in influencing conscious consumption. She shared insights on how effectively engaging consumers can drive demand for sustainable fashion, creating a ripple effect throughout the industry.

Post-Event Reflection: Sustainable Fashion and Textiles Forum Truro

Looking ahead, the panel explored emerging trends poised to make significant impacts on circularity. Sophie highlighted how WRAP's data and reports, such as the Footprint Tool, offer invaluable support to businesses. She emphasized that these tools help companies understand their environmental impacts by providing clear methodologies and actionable insights, enabling them to make informed decisions on reducing carbon and water footprints within the textiles sector. Allen Alexander underscored the critical role that innovation and knowledge-sharing play in accelerating the adoption of circular business models, particularly among smaller firms. He emphasized that sharing insights and capabilities across the industry can speed up the transition to circular practices.

The discussion underscored the multifaceted nature of the circularity challenge—combining technical innovation, creative design, cultural shifts, and consumer education. The panelists agreed that collaboration, both within the industry and with external partners, is key to making meaningful progress in circular fashion and textiles.

"I was delighted to meet so many wonderful academics, designers, innovators, business owners, policy advocates, makers. Thank you so much...for the invitation to share my thoughts on a lively panel discussion." (Natascha Radclyffe-Thomas)

Workshop Session

In the late morning, attendees participated in an interactive workshop where small groups worked together to identify shared challenges and explore potential solutions. The energy in the room was palpable as participants exchanged ideas, explored potential partnerships, and discussed actionable strategies for implementing circular solutions in their own businesses.

"The workshop highlighted the importance of connecting with place and localisation, especially through digitisation. We also explored how repair can be a powerful tool to foster connection, and saw real potential for grassroots efforts in driving cultural shifts toward sustainability." (Quote from workshop participant)

Post-Event Reflection: Sustainable Fashion and Textiles Forum Truro

Afternoon Conversations

The afternoon sessions featured a series of engaging conversations with industry experts on key topics, including repair strategies, sustainable design, and innovations in biodegradable and natural materials. Amy Brock-Morgan from Finisterre and Livia Regina Batista-Pritchard from the University of Exeter discussed the future of repair and sustainable design, offering practical insights on how businesses can help develop an ethic of care.

The discussion between Livia and Amy explored the critical role of repair in fostering sustainability in the fashion industry. Amy shared her journey at Finisterre, where she spearheaded the scaling of repairs, emphasizing how repair can shift consumer mindsets and disrupt industry norms. She pointed out that repair offers emotional value, creating deeper connections with clothing, and it has a transformative potential for circular business models.

Livia highlighted the cultural significance of repair from her Brazilian background, noting how repair is ingrained in some communities yet is rising as a lifestyle trend in others. Both emphasized the importance of educating consumers and businesses about the value of repair, from workshops to product care guides, to shift perspectives on longevity and aftercare.

Collaboration between brands, researchers, and policymakers was stressed as essential to overcome the skills gap and develop new processes. Amy mentioned that clear communication, pilot projects, and data are key to integrating repair into business operations, while Livia argued for academia's role in co-producing practical, impactful knowledge alongside practitioners.

In closing, Amy advised businesses starting out with repair to build strong cross-departmental relationships and begin with a clear reporting system, while Livia encouraged them to view repair as a way to engage meaningfully with people and materials. Both agreed that collaboration, education, and innovation will drive the future of repair in fashion.

Post-Event Reflection: Sustainable Fashion and Textiles Forum Truro

“The current system is damaging to earth; we need a closer relationship to what we own and who makes. This means we begin to foster a deeper connection with what lives in our wardrobes, and thus start treating them as trusted friends. My mission is to communicate, educate and shift the way we think about clothes”
(Amy Brock-Morgan)

Later, Aurélie Fontan and Ruth Cherrington delved into the role of biodegradable materials, offering a glimpse into the future of circular fashion through innovative materials and processes.

“Designing with natural materials requires aligning the product with its intended purpose. While plant-based alternatives are exciting, they won't always match the durability of traditional materials like animal leather. It's essential to be realistic about the strengths and limitations of these sustainable options.”
(Aurélie Fontan)

Closing Thoughts

The day concluded with a final conversation on reusing and recycling sport textiles, featuring Ramon Van de Velde from The Wave Project, Peter Palmer from Circular Flow, and Marta Ferri from the University of Exeter. Their work with neoprene and other materials underscored the importance of collaboration and innovation in creating sustainable solutions for challenging materials.

“With our partners SUEZ UK [and] generous funding of both [Suez](#) and the [Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Good Growth Fund](#) we collect, process, and then sell, repair or recycle thousands of neoprene wetsuits. This is a win-win-win as we not only raise vital funds for our amazing charity...but we also help the environment by taking very damaging material out of the waste cycle.” (Ramon Van de Velde)

Looking Ahead

This event highlighted the urgency of transitioning toward more sustainable practices within the fashion and textiles industry and underscored the importance of collaborative action. By sharing knowledge, building partnerships, and exploring innovative solutions, we can drive meaningful change. We look forward to continuing this journey with all those who attended. Together, we can build a future where fashion not only thrives but also respects and preserves the planet.

Post-Event Reflection: Sustainable Fashion and Textiles Forum Truro

