



JUNE 2019 SUMMARY REPORT

ORGANISERS:

Esben Rahbek Gjerdrum Pedersen, COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL

Kirsti Raitan Andersen, COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL

Else Skjold, DESIGN SCHOOL KOLDING

WHY THE SUSTAINABLE FASHION RESEARCH AGENDA?

Sustainable fashion has been the subject of extensive debate and claims over the past decade. Brands, networks, certification bodies, industry associations and consultancies all promote the notion of sustainable fashion. While the level of activity is impressive, however, there is often a lack of fact-based information about the actual extent of progress being made towards sustainability in the fashion industry. For instance, even though new and more sustainable materials and technologies are introduced almost every day, little data exist on the actual uptake of these solutions. More evidence and less rhetoric is needed to advance sustainable fashion to the next level.

The aim of the Sustainable Fashion Research Agenda (SFRA) is to take stock of the current state of affairs in sustainable fashion. The SFRA brings together critically reflective scholars and practitioners to take part in research-informed discussion about key aspects of sustainable fashion, including circularity and consumer behaviour.

In this way we hope to inspire a more evidence-based discussion of sustainable fashion and lay the foundation for new forms of collaboration and partnerships between academia and practice.

The SFRA Conference of 2019 was only the first of what we hope to be recurring annual conferences on sustainable fashion research. We will soon begin identifying new themes for the 2020 SFRA event and in this process, we will very much welcome all input from SFRA participants and other interested parties with knowledge and expertise in sustainable fashion. Our aim is to foster an open and inclusive discussion of the sustainable fashion research agenda both now and in the future.

We thank you for your participation and look forward to seeing you next year,

The Organizers



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the 2019 SFRA Conference participants who contributed to the debate and shared their valuable insights into sustainable fashion research and practice. Your active participation played a significant role in the success of the event! We would also like to extend our special thanks to all the speakers, panellists, facilitators, and minute-takers who shared their knowledge and guided us through the day: Kate Fletcher, Lori DiVito, Bert van Son, Jeremy Moon, Jette Lindgaard, Herman Stål, Betina Simonsen, Kerli Kant Hvass, Gerrit Bouwhuis, Annemieke Coster, Kate Goldsworthy, Ingun Klepp, Ed Renner, Mette Therkildsen, Lena T. Hansen, Katherine Townsend, Erin Leitheiser, Anne Louise Bang and Mathilda Tham. We are also very grateful for the generous financial support of the Carlsberg Foundation and the Future Ways of Working project. Last but not least, a very big thank you to the Carlsberg Academy and all of the Academy staff who provided a superb venue for the SFRA event.



THE UNION OF CONCERNED RESEARCHERS IN FASHION

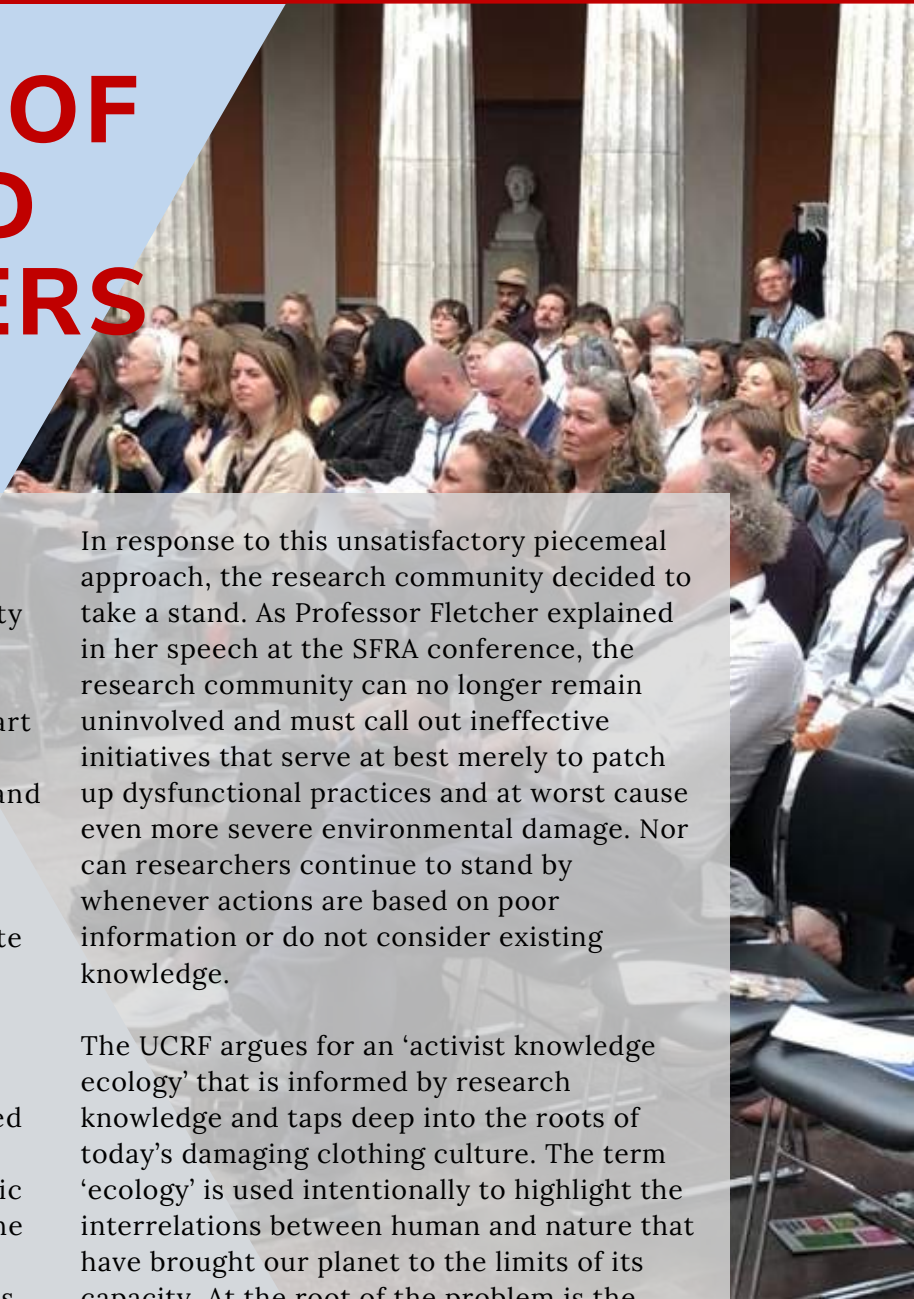
The Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion (UCRF) was initiated in November 2018 by leading researchers of sustainability and fashion. The Union's Manifesto, which essentially calls for researchers and their findings to play a much more pro-active part in public debates about sustainability, has now been signed by over 350 researchers and representatives of NGOs and the fashion industry from across the world.

The Manifesto was presented in the keynote speech given by Professor Kate Fletcher at the launch the SFRA conference. Professor Fletcher set out the aims shared by the overall agenda of the SFRA, above all the need for academics to break out of secluded offices and lecture-halls and take a more proactive role both in industry and in public debates in order to share with the world the knowledge we have developed through artistic, qualitative and quantitative studies, industry collaborations and critical academic thinking.

As well as marking the formation of the UCRF, 2018 was also a year when the fashion industry finally came to realize that sustainability is not a passing trend but a new framework defining their operations. Despite numerous initiatives by brands and larger industry players to make fashion more sustainable in recent years, these have largely taken the form of isolated and technology-based test-outs applied to limited parts of fashion collections rather than major strategic decisions to ensure sustainable development.

In response to this unsatisfactory piecemeal approach, the research community decided to take a stand. As Professor Fletcher explained in her speech at the SFRA conference, the research community can no longer remain uninvolved and must call out ineffective initiatives that serve at best merely to patch up dysfunctional practices and at worst cause even more severe environmental damage. Nor can researchers continue to stand by whenever actions are based on poor information or do not consider existing knowledge.

The UCRF argues for an 'activist knowledge ecology' that is informed by research knowledge and taps deep into the roots of today's damaging clothing culture. The term 'ecology' is used intentionally to highlight the interrelations between human and nature that have brought our planet to the limits of its capacity. At the root of the problem is the 'make-use-waste' culture that has evolved through the growth of industry and capitalism. To address the pressing need for change, the UCRF Manifesto commits us as researchers to contribute to the enactment of 'new relationships between humans and the Earth in the context of fashion'. The SFRA conference of 2019 should be understood in the light of this agenda and as the first of many more initiatives to come within the framework of the UCRF.



THE MANIFESTO OF THE UNION OF CONCERNED RESEARCHERS IN FASHION

The Earth's planetary boundaries and ecosystems are under threat. Fashion and clothing products and activities contribute to the destruction of these systems and exacerbate the increasing disconnection between humans and the Earth.

We, the Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion, recognise that the response of the fashion sector to the intensifying ecological crisis has been – and continues to be – over-simplified, fragmented and obstructed by the growth logic of capitalist business models as they are currently realised and practised. Further, we recognize that uncritical research findings, duplication of research, reduction and misuse of scientific and technical knowledge all serve to exacerbate up this overly simplistic approach in the fashion industry.

It is our view that concerned fashion and clothing researchers can no longer remain uninvolved or complacent and that as researchers we need to conduct ourselves in new ways. We call on fashion researchers to unite in concerted action and leadership in the use of scientific and artistic knowledge that is more relevant to and commensurate with the multiple crises we face. For us this action requires both that something fundamental be disrupted and that something significantly different be offered. We are committed to examining and accelerating the uptake of diverse 'other ways' in the fashion sector.

The Union of Concerned Researchers thus proposes to:

1. Create an 'activist knowledge ecology' by developing a system of knowledge about fashion sustainability that is concerned with how knowledge is organised and shared as well as the data points themselves, and to direct such a system purposefully towards fostering change;
2. Advocate for whole systems change and a paradigm shift beyond current norms and business-as-usual. This includes rejecting overly-cautious economic, legislative and policy frameworks;
3. Diversify the voices within fashion and sustainability discourse to reflect multiple perspectives beyond currently predominant business approaches, including but not limited to perspectives from the global south and indigenous communities;
4. Express our determined opposition to ill-advised and destructive fashion projects;
5. Formulate visions—and corresponding research practices—that will enable the enactment of new relationships between humans and Earth in the context of fashion;
6. Take a leadership role in debating existing and new ideas and in creating action around fashion-sustainability themes, especially in areas where the generation of new knowledge is of current or potential future significance;
7. Devise ways of encouraging research applications to address the underlying root causes of pressing environmental and social problems, including but not limited to climate change, wealth inequality, biodiversity loss, and plastic pollution;
8. Organise fashion researchers, whenever determined desirable and feasible, to translate radical step changes into effective political and other forms of action;
9. Review and revise this manifesto when deemed necessary.

2019 CONFERENCE THEMES: CULTURE OF COMPLIANCE, CIRCULARITY, AND SUSTAINABILITY AND USE

The SFRA Conference of 2019 selected three themes linked to sustainable fashion. The Culture of Compliance theme took its point of departure in the rapid proliferation of certification schemes, measurement systems, reporting standards, transparency tools, and industry alliances linked to sustainable fashion, asking how all these new compliance mechanisms really contribute to sustainable fashion. The Circularity theme addressed the barriers to achieving circular economies in the context of the fashion sector and the potential of circularity for minimising waste in this sector, asking how it is possible to mitigate and close the fashion loops. The third theme, Sustainability and Use, highlighted the discrepancy between users' needs, wants and values and current fashion product offerings that decrease value and increase waste in the fashion sector.

Prior to the SFRA events, participants were asked to give their views on what they thought were the most burning issues on the sustainable fashion research agenda. Some excerpts from the participants' responses are provided below:

- “How does the triumph of e-retailing affect sustainability efforts in the industry and how it is driving the re-structuring of the industry?”
- “How to provide transparency, decent working conditions and fair wages throughout the supply chain? How to educate brands and manufacturers that \$ is not the only bottom line?”
- “How can research (in sustainable fashion and in sustainability in general) (help) find ways that simultaneously allow us to break down and simplify the field, but still embrace and emphasize its complexity?”
- “What approach can be used to make it easier for large companies to rapidly move towards becoming more circular?”
- “How can we achieve greater change and impact for the entire industry, e.g. through common standards?”
- “The very nature of 'fast fashion' is predicated on high rates of consumption. Yet from a sustainability perspective we know that buying fewer, higher quality items is one of the most pragmatic and effective solutions to lessen the apparel industry's negative impacts. Accordingly, can there really be such a thing as 'sustainable fashion', or is it just an oxymoron?”
- “How can the customer know the difference between sustainability and greenwashing?”
- “What type of sorting facilities are expected to be found in DK/EU when textiles are a part of municipality waste?”
- “How to slow down the fashion cycle and provide better fitting and longer-lasting clothing (both in terms of durability and aesthetic sustainability)?”
- “How can we combine the right stakeholders throughout the full value chain so they become able to truly work in circular economies both as big and small stakeholders?”
- “How to reduce our extreme consumption of garments; to make us all understand we have to produce less in higher quality and wear our garments for a longer time -then find a suitable way to reuse or dispose of the worn-out garment. There is a great deal of misleading and wrong information about textiles and sustainability - since many twist the facts to fit their interests. It's difficult to know who to trust as a professional, but for an end consumer it must be almost impossible to navigate.”
- “How can we make certificates/political guidelines/laws that can help make the industry more green, less harmful and make the suppliers/producer more responsible?”

This section draws on the conference notes from the minute-taker, Erin Leitheiser, of the Copenhagen Business School.

CULTURE OF COMPLIANCE

Overall, the SFRA event confirmed the need for more effective social and environmental compliance mechanisms in the fashion sector. However, it was also acknowledged that compliance is a highly complex domain involving numerous issues and questions. Which issues should be covered? How high should standards be? How should companies deal with tensions and trade-offs? Should standards cover the company, the value chain, or the entire industry? What is the most effective way to deal with non-compliance? Should there be different standards for small and for large companies?

Some of the challenges of compliance are related to the object of compliance, since sustainability, responsibility, and circularity are all umbrella concepts that can give rise to multiple interpretations and misinterpretations. Selective use of terms such as 'sustainability', 'transparency', and 'consciousness' can be used to mislead customers, industry partners and the public in general. Similarly, overselling sustainability is also a concern, for example when only an insignificant part of the production is certified but this element is oversold in order to brand the entire company as sustainable.

The difficulties of attaining a precise fix on sustainability mean that consumers can easily become victims of greenwashing. Moreover, the multiplicity of standards makes it difficult to ascertain the most appropriate and effective choices for each individual company. At a more fundamental level, the current infrastructure of the fashion industry has led to generations growing up without ever knowing the value of sustainably produced, long-lasting and high-quality clothes. Substantial efforts are needed, therefore, to educate consumers in selecting products that comply with high social and environmental standards.

Upstream, compliance challenges include the issue of suppliers now having to comply with multiple and not necessarily consistent buyer requirements regarding social and environmental responsibility. Moreover, not all suppliers believe that buyers' declared sustainability requirements actually match their purchasing practices. Price, quality and delivery time remain the key criteria for buyers. Rather than policing approaches, therefore, there is a need for consistent standards to enable buyers and suppliers to work together to bring about long-term improvements in social and environmental performance throughout the supply chain.

Companies often associate sustainability with risks rather than opportunities and are therefore reluctant to share knowledge about current practices, observed challenges and desired changes. The current risk barrier can also act as a barrier to collaborating with partners on new standards and compliance mechanisms. In general, an action research agenda is needed whereby scholars and practitioners from different sectors can work together to implement and study improvements in sustainability.



This section draws on the conference notes of the minute-taker, Kerli Kant Hvass, Copenhagen Business School.

CIRCULARITY

Minimizing waste through circular economic systems is a hot topic in the fashion industry. There is widespread consensus that the current linear fashion infrastructure generates overconsumption and massive amounts of waste. More and more brands are now experimenting with take-back systems, recycled materials, leasing models and other solutions intended to slow down or close fashion loops.

However, there are multiple technological, regulatory, financial, organizational, cultural, and behavioural barriers to circularity in the fashion industry. Some recycling technologies have limitations in terms of quality and volume, for example, while others are costly and commercially unattractive.

Moreover, a general lack of transparency and traceability in the fashion supply chain makes it difficult to design and implement circular business models. From a market perspective, the fast fashion industry is increasing while the quality of clothing is decreasing. We need to bring respect back to our clothes and capture the value they have.

Circularity has consequences for all stakeholders involved in the fashion industry. From a company perspective, circularity is a complex topic that managers and employees do not always understand or know how to deal with. From a consumer perspective, people are confused about what to buy, how to use sustainable products and properly dispose of them when no longer needed. It is essential, therefore, to empower consumers to make more sustainable choices.

It was generally acknowledged at the conference that circular business models require new ways of optimising collaboration throughout the supply and demand chain. More collaboration is also needed between academia and business. This in turn entails that researchers should make their work more accessible and relevant to practice. A related issue that needs to be addressed is that researchers sometimes work with different time horizons compared to those applied by practitioners. It was further agreed at the conference that companies must be fully transparent and honest about their business practices. This is essential because at present there is often insufficient data available to allow for a thorough analysis of company commitments to sustainability and circularity.



This section draws on conference notes from the minute-taker Anne Louise Bang, of the Kolding Design School.

SUSTAINABILITY AND USE

Industry players have voiced some perplexity as to why consumers are apparently unwilling to pay for so-called 'sustainable fashion' and would rather pay for 'quality', 'looking successful' or 'value for money' instead.[1] As researchers, however, we look at this from an entirely different perspective. During the last 10 years a growing number of researchers have been exploring the precise meanings of quality, value and 'feelings of appropriateness'. What we have found is that there is a fundamental gap between industry operations and users' needs, dreams and aspirations.



One fundamental issue, for example, is the issue of size. Research shows that less than 10% of clothing actually fits anyone due to the standardisation measures of the fashion industry being based on ideal body types. Research results further show that people are willing to invest in clothing that they value in terms of fit, materials, aesthetic expression, and ability to represent norms of appropriate dress in local settings. Notably, these considerations often bear very little, if any relation to fashion trends.

These consumer values favour garments that deliver when it comes to sustainability since such clothes are both technically and emotionally durable, which is why they are well maintained, repaired and valued in secondary use. This is an important finding given that poor quality clothing is currently flooding the entire value chain, threatening to drive the global second-hand market into collapse. The conference highlighted findings that show size differentiation creates better value for money, thus allowing companies to invest backwards in the value chain with regards to environment and social conduct. Findings also show that retail currently acts as a bottleneck, since retailers often do not recognize smaller drop collections that actually sold out, preferring large, trend-based collections instead, of which most items end up on sale, outlet, or in the textile waste sector.

An important distinction was highlighted between use and consumption. 'Use' denotes the part of the value chain of clothing whereby we acquire, wear, maintain, share and care for our clothes. Integrating such understanding at systems scale would require the development of a new terminology at all levels, since it fundamentally breaks with the way industry is currently shaped around the idea of novelty. This terminology needs to take into consideration the actual desires and concerns that occur in the use phase, thus fostering design strategies for diversity and re-introducing more textile skills at both industry-level and use-level.

[1] <https://www.globalfashionagenda.com/pulse-2019-update/#>

SUMMARY & NEXT STEPS

The SFRA Conference of 2019 was a first try-out of an event designed to stimulate debate based on research findings and industry experience. The format tested for this initial conference was based on three focus areas, with morning sessions dedicated to expert insights from industry and academia, and inclusive afternoon workshops for debating and discussing. Even with very little advertising, the event had a substantial waiting list because of the small venue (max. 120 people). The event planted a seed for a more holistic and fact-based public debate on fashion and sustainability that embraces all pillars of knowledge and experience in the field.

What did we learn from the conference as organisers? The selection of three 'burning' topics from amongst the vast and multifaceted debate on sustainability proved effective, though it was clear from the complexity of the discussions that each of the themes could have served as a single theme for a one-day conference. Combining research knowledge and critical thinking with hands-on industry challenges in SMEs created a forum for openness towards sharing and future-oriented thinking. The afternoon workshops could well have been facilitated as 'tasks' to solve in multidisciplinary teams, perhaps allowing for more inclusiveness. However, these workshops did stimulate valuable insights for moving forward within each theme. These insights are summarized below in the form of key questions to be pursued in future collaboration between researchers, NGOs, companies and users:

- *How can Cultures of Compliance be aligned globally to comply more closely with nature and people?*
- *How can business models aimed at achieving Circularity be transformed so as to focus on the slower circulation of better products and materials to minimize waste rather than the current focus on speed?*
- *How might understandings of Sustainability and Use inspire industry, education and users to advance the development of more sustainable future systems, products, retail and services?*

We will be keeping you updated on future SFRA activities, and meanwhile we encourage you to explore future projects, funding and sharing opportunities in our LinkedIn group "**Sustainable Fashion Research Agenda**".

You can also keep up to date with UCRF initiatives at: <http://www.concernedresearchers.org>



APPENDIX: MEDIA COVERAGE AND LIST OF PARTICIPANTS TO SFRA 2019

Media Coverage linked to the SFRA Conference of 2019

"Bæredygtige tiltag i modebranchen sluges af voksende produktion". Mette Guldagger & Sarah Skarum, Politiken, 11.5.19

"Bæredygtigt tøj: for og imod tre grønne tendenser i tekstilbranchen". Mette Guldagger, Politiken, 11.5.19

"Copenhagen event calls for post-growth future". Tone Tobiasson, EcoTextile News, 15.5.19

"H&M går forrest med innovativ bæredygtighed men vil ikke indse vores største problem". Kristian Keller, Soundvenue, 15.5.19

"10 Takeaways from the Sustainable Fashion Research Agenda Conference". Charlotte Turner, Eco-Age. 16.5.19

"Cause for Concern – the Researchers Calling for Fashion Change". Lucy Siegle. 16.5.19

"Mode- og bæredygtighedsekspert: Mary godt symbol på branchens skizofreni". Marie Milling, B.T., 16.5.19

"Gør din garderobe bæredygtig". Torsten Grundwald, Den Velklædte Mand, 20.5.19

"En klimaafgift på tøj betyder ikke nødvendigvis en skævvridning af samfundet". Kristian Keller, Soundvenue, 21.5.19

"Forskere efter Copenhagen Fashion Summit: Vi skal starte et andet sted. Men det er der". Carla Christine Bruus Aagaard-strube, Fashion Forum, 24.5.19

"Modebranche med lappeløsninger". Karoline Kjær Hansen, klimatillæg i Jysk-Fynske medier, juni 2019

List of Participants

First name:	Last name:	Organization:
Alexandra	Harder Lindek	Designskolen Kolding
Alfred	Vernis	Inditex
Allan	Kruse	JTS ARK TORPEDO
Anja Bakken	Riise	Framtiden i våre hender/Future in Our Hands
Anna	Gynther Borges	Copenhagen Business School
Anna	Gulmann	KEA
Anna	Pehrsson	TEXAID
Anna-Mamusu	Sesav	Design School Kolding
Anne Louise	Bang	Design School Kolding
Annemieke	Koster	Enschede Textielstad
Astrid Tolnov	Larsen	KADK
Bert	van Son	Mud Jeans
Betina	Simonsen	Lifestyle & Design Cluster
Camilla Maria	Ishøy	CMINT Design
Cathrine	Pedersen	QUARTZ
Cathryn	Hall	Centre for Circular Design
Catja	Beck-Berge	Kopenhagen Fur
Charlotte	Piller	Copenhagen Business School
Charlotte	Turner	Eco-Age
Charlotte Ruud	Granum	Framtiden i våre hender/Future in Our Hands
Christine	Mogensen	Kromtex ApS
Craig	Native	UngiAarhus
Danielle	Bruggeman	ArtEZ University of the Arts
Dilys	Williams	centre for sustainable fashion
Dorte	Salskov-Iversen	Copenhagen Business School
Dorte Lenau	Klint	Danish Color Board
Ed	Renner	sur le chemin
Else	Skjold	Kolding Design School
Elsebeth	Gerner	Kolding Design School
Erin	Leitheiser	Copenhagen Business School
Esben R.G.	Pedersen	Copenhagen Business School
Eva Harpøth	Skjoldborg	CSR.dk
Evangeline	Ziegler	Global Brands Group
Fabian Faurholt	Csaba	CBS
Fie Ann-Catrine	Askov Hansen	Mascot
Frederik	Larsen	In futurum
Gerald	Rudeman	Zdoit
Gerrit	Bouwhuis	Saxion Hogeschool
Gisle	Mardal	Norwegian Fashion Hub
Gitika	Goyal	CUT ONE
Heidi	Laura	Weekendavisen
Helen	Goworek	University of Leicester
Helle	Graabæk	Designskolen Kolding
Helle	Bjerregaard	Sourcing House
Helle	Ågren	Start up
Herman	Stål	Umea School of Business, Economics and Statistics
Ingun Grimstad	Klepp	SIFO OsloMet
Irene	Hvid	New era
Janine	Dortmundt	Dansk Initiativ for Etisk Handel

List of Participants

Jeremy	Moon	CBS
Jette	Lindgaard	Dansk Mode og Tekstil
Jette	Steen Knudsen	Tufts University
Johanne	Stenstrup	Sustain Daily
Johanne Kappel	Andersen	Norse Projects
Judith	Ter Haar	ArtEZ University of the Arts MA Fashion Strategy
Karen Marie	Hasling	Design School Kolding
Kari	Brandt	COZE Aarhus A/S
Karin	Mammen Bjørneboe	Tricotage
Kate	Fletcher	Centre for Sustainable Fashion, University of the Arts
Kate	Goldsworthy	University of the Arts London
Katherine	Townsend	Nottingham Trent University
Kathrine	Hager	År
Kerli	Kant Hvass	Copenhagen Business School
Kim	Mogensen	Kromtex ApS
Kjetil	Aas	sur le chemin
Laura	Terkildsen	Laura Lava
Laura	Rainier	Li & Fung
Lena Trend	Hansen	COZE Aarhus A/S
Leonardo	Bonanni	Sourcemap Inc.
Linda	Pedersen	east
Line Frank	Frank	Line Frank
Linn	Meidell Dybdahl	NIFU
Liv	Collatz	Journalist
Lone	Mogensen	A-tex
Lori	DiVito	Amsterdam School of International Business
Louise	Ravnløkke	Design School Kolding
Lykke	Kjær	LykkeKjaer
Mai	Bui	Pompadelux ApS
Malene	Kristiansen	Det Kongelige Danske Kunstakademi
Mandy	Ferrand	Creative design consultant
Manou	Messmann	Manou.dk
Maria	Wolf	aiayu
Marianne	Thiim	Fashion Design Akademiet
Mathias	Brok	Kopenhagen Fur
Maude	Rahbek	Masai Clothing Company
Mette	Lind Jensen	Samsøe
Mette	Terkildsen	VIA Design
Mille	Kyvsgaard	PWT Group
Mille Marie	Jensen	Freelancer
Morten	Dilling	Dilling-underwear.dk
Morten	Lehmann	GFA
Moussa	McHangama	In futurum
Nadine	Möllenkamp	Designschool Kolding
Nikola	Kjørboe	DAKOFA
Nora	Ørum Ringdal	Copenhagen Business School
Pernille	Skriver	Nomad Living
Pia	Odgaard	Dansk Fashion and Textile
Prisca	Viltsbol	Manufacture Copenhagen

List of Participants

Randi	Nolan	Global Brands Group
Rikke C	Johnsen	PompeLux ApS
Sally	Townsend	Outland Denim
Sidse	Jensen	Masai Clothing Company
Silke	Sønderstrup-Granquist	Sourcing House
Simon	Hansen	Dansk Mode & Textil
Sine	Gerstenberg	Berlingske
Siv Elin	Ånestad	Framtiden i våre hender/Future in Our Hands
Sofie	Ringtved Jensen	Fashion Forum
Solveig	Søndergaard	Kolding Design School
Susanne	Guldager	KEA
Thomas	Binder	Design School Kolding
Thomas	Juhl Glavind	Kopenhagen Fur
Tina	Sund	Tina Sund Design Consult
Tine	Tourell Søderberg	CARCEL
Tone Skårdal	Tobiasson	EcoTextile News
Trine	Storm	Kopenhagen Fur
Ulla	Ræbild	Design School Kolding
Vibeke	Riisberg	Design School Kolding
Virve	Vend	NORR AS
William	Hager	År
Yasuyuki	Cho	Japan Textile Federation