

THE NICE CONSUMER

FRAMEWORK FOR ACHIEVING
SUSTAINABLE FASHION CONSUMPTION
THROUGH COLLABORATION





The NICE Consumer project—a new joint initiative led by the Danish Fashion Institute and BSR under Nordic Initiative, Clean and Ethical (NICE)—aims to inspire changes in government policies and business practices to help consumers make more sustainable choices in the acquisition, use, care for and disposal of fashion items.

From November 2011 through May 2012, the NICE Consumer project developed the vision and framework for sustainable fashion consumption described in this document. This output is based on research and dialogue with leaders and stakeholders of the fashion industry.

We view sustainable fashion consumption as a long term journey, which we have only just begun, as shown below.

Achieving sustainable fashion consumption requires a long-term transformation in attitudes, behaviours and business models. The NICE Consumer project's first phase focused on inspiring the fashion industry, policy makers and civil society to accelerate this transformation and to commit to collaborating in pursuit of sustainable fashion consumption and production. Subsequent phases will focus on making this vision a reality.

As part of the NICE Consumer project, BSR, the Danish Fashion Institute and the Copenhagen Resource Institute published a research report which:

- Presented a draft working definition for sustainable fashion and sustainable fashion consumption, and described in practical terms the changes in consumer attitudes and behaviours necessary to support them
- Identified current barriers to sustainable fashion consumption
- Applied lessons from successful awareness raising and behaviour change campaigns to the fashion industry
- Outlined the potential roles for industry, government, civil society and consumers in reshaping the fashion industry toward sustainable consumption.

Using the research report as a basis for discussion, a series of three public webinars and three in-person workshops were organised to share emerging good practices and to gather feedback to develop the framework for achieving sustainable fashion consumption. At least 250 individuals from brands and retailers, academia, NGOs and government agencies participated in the consultation process.

The framework presented in the following pages is intended to inspire and drive coordinated action and innovation over the long term so that consumers can enjoy fashion while improving their impact on people, planet and profit.

INSPIRE NICE CONSUMER PROJECT 1 |

JANUARY–JUNE 2012

- REPORT RELEASE
- PUBLIC CONSULTATION
- RECOMMENDATIONS TO STAKEHOLDERS

SUPPORT NICE CONSUMER PROJECT 2 |

MID-2012–2015 |
TBC

- POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION
- BUSINESS IMPLEMENTATION AND CAMPAIGN PILOTING

PERPETUATE

- EXPANDED CONSUMER CAMPAIGNS
- IMPACT ASSESSMENT



For the purposes of the NICE Consumer project, we use the following draft working definitions:

Sustainable fashion is a dynamic process to develop and to implement design philosophies and business practices for managing triple bottom line impacts (economic, social and environmental) linked to the lifecycle of apparel, footwear, accessories and other fashion goods.

Sustainable fashion consumption is the use of clothing for purposes beyond utilitarian needs, which is achieved while enabling the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Fashion consumption encompasses a complex range of interactions between individuals and the fashion system (consumption and production).

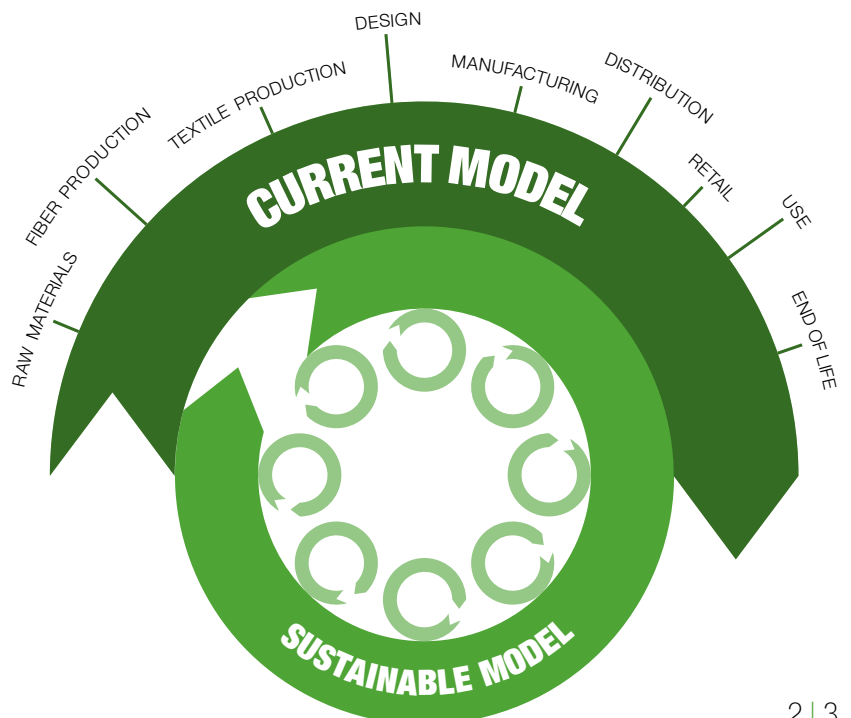
The following diagram shows key material flows and processes throughout the current fashion production and consumption system. These represent focal points for managing impacts and re-thinking the current model.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

We believe that a **fundamental redesign of the fashion industry is possible**, which will enable individuals to express their personal style through fashion, and for businesses to profit, while progressively reducing negative impacts. To achieve this, the current model, which is based on rapid responses to customer preferences, just-in-time manufacturing supply chains, successions of collections, and a continuous flow of new items, needs to be re-conceptualised to incorporate closed-loop thinking.¹

Remaking the system is a big challenge, though we are certain that designers, entrepreneurs and brands will rise to it, and find ways to thrive in a redesigned fashion industry. However, we are also aware that our current ways of thinking will have to change and many incentives will impede the transformation. Thus we see a multi-dimensional, ongoing, and sometimes frustrating transition which is underway and continuing to evolve.

We need innovation at every stage in the value chain and throughout the system as a whole. Moreover, consideration of consumer desires and behaviours is critical during the design, retail, use and end-of-life phases.



¹— Rather than “loopy thinking”, the circular arrows are meant to convey how actions in one part of the value chain have consequences for other parts. For example, design choices affect consumer behaviour and impacts related to raw materials. We believe a holistic view of the current and desired future state of the fashion consumption and production system is needed, and that holistic solutions are an imperative to move toward sustainability. In addition, the loops are meant to signify the conservation of materials, and their diversion from landfill toward re-use, recycling and upcycling.



► **CONSUMERS ARE AWARE OF AND CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF FASHION**





► **CONSUMERS FIND AND ACQUIRE SUSTAINABLE FASHION GOODS AND SERVICES**


THE NICE CONSUMER VISION


Our vision is that individuals and communities will interact with the fashion industry and enjoy innovative products and services while reducing the associated negative social, environmental and economic impacts, and while contributing to a more sustainable development process globally. The fashion industry can have a positive impact related to inspiration and creativity, employment, entrepreneurship and profit, and these should not be lost in the transition.

We envision four focus areas for sustainable attitudes and behaviours linked to fashion consumption:

 **Awareness:** Individuals are aware of and care about sustainable fashion and the environmental, social and economic impacts of the consumption and production of fashion

 **Planning, Searching, and Acquiring:** Individuals act as sustainable stewards of their wardrobes and acquire sustainable fashion goods and services, which are increasingly long-lasting, second-hand, or produced in a way that is more sustainable, including but not limited to certification to credible sustainability standards

 **Wearing, Caring and Sharing:** Individuals keep and wear garments for more seasons and occasions; they care for garments in a low-impact way, including low-temperature washing and line-drying; repair them whenever possible; and share them with friends and family members

 **End of life:** Individuals contribute unwanted garments to second-hand, re-use and recycling schemes, including for recovery or upcycling of fabrics and fibres



► **CONSUMERS WEAR, CARE FOR AND REPAIR GARMENTS IN A LOW-IMPACT WAY**



► **CONSUMERS RECYCLE GARMENTS FOR REUSE OR RECOVERY OF FIBRES**

Our assumptions in pursuit of this vision

Consumers want to do the right thing—to be NICE while enjoying fashion—but they don't know how and are sometimes blocked from doing so. Individuals want the opportunity to dress well and look great, without needing to always buy more stuff and change their wardrobes seasonally.

We do not believe that business is evil, that government is always bureaucratic, or that civil society is naïve. There are many promising efforts and initiatives emerging. However, these are often small scale and disconnected. In order to make sustainable fashion consumption mainstream, we believe that a common vision is required and that collaboration is critical to send a strong message to consumers that sustainable consumption is beautiful, cool, sexy and here to stay.

Below and throughout the following pages, we suggest a framework of actions to enable sustainable fashion consumption and what we need to measure so we know when it arrives in the mainstream.

How will we know we've achieved success?

Collecting information is an expensive and time intensive process. However, establishing baselines and targets is a key priority for industry and policy makers to know if their actions are leading to changes in attitudes and behaviour. We suggest several options below for measuring progress toward sustainable consumption, which require further elaboration and resources to implement.

Awareness: Consumer surveys and behavioural studies can be used to confirm the current level of awareness of consumers. Some projects currently underway, such as the MISTRA Future Fashion project in Sweden, the Textile Waste as a Resource project in Norway, and the Sustainable Clothing Action Plan in the UK, will provide a good baseline from which measures and targets for increasing awareness and changing behaviour can be extrapolated and developed.

Planning, Searching and Acquiring: Attitudes and behaviours related to planning, searching for and acquiring fashion can be measured by tracking the number of garments in individuals' possession, online searches for sustainable fashion-linked terms, and purchasing behaviours in retail and second-hand shops.

Wearing, Caring and Sharing: Attitudes and behaviours during the use phase can be difficult to track, although mobile technology and social media are creating new opportunities to both motivate and track consumer behaviour. Key measures can include the average useful lives of garments, and habits related to washing and drying. We can also collect data to determine if and to what extent items are being repaired in repair shops or by individuals at home. We need more knowledge of both public and private solutions and practices for caring and sharing.

End of life: Municipal waste agencies can help determine estimates for the number and weight of garments that are disposed in landfills every year. In addition, consumer behaviour studies can track what happens to garments when they are no longer wanted. Finally, the recycling industry itself can provide statistics on weight, value and fate of post-consumer materials.

We also believe that the industry can be more transparent concerning design choices and the sustainability attributes of products, such as lifecycle impact assessments, which are critical for understanding progress in reducing negative impacts. We also believe corporate governance and accountability are critically important for both the current and future states of the fashion industry.



COLLABORATION CAN ACCELERATE THE TRANSITION TO SUSTAINABLE FASHION CONSUMPTION

The NICE Consumer project's research and consultation activities uncovered more than one-hundred tangible examples of individuals, brands, government agencies and NGOs working on changing the fashion consumption and production system to be more sustainable. We believe these efforts are necessary and should be scaled up and coordinated. In addition, we heard an interest in more focus on holistic and comprehensive solutions.

Below we set out an agenda for continued collaboration among industry, government and civil society, and in the following pages we describe a set of potential commitments that organisations (whether individually or collectively) could sign up to.

Agenda for Sustainable Fashion Consumption Collaboration

- Ongoing dialogue among stakeholders to learn from each other, provide input and support to each other's work, and to explore and invest in new business models
- Baseline studies on consumer attitudes, behaviours and practices with particular focus on commonalities and differences by geography, gender, age and income levels
- Standards/guidelines for product transparency and care labels
- Co-developing and implementing consumer awareness and behaviour change campaigns

Below we present potential shared commitments:

1. The industry will engage in open and constructive dialogue with government and civil society to advance sustainable fashion consumption
 - *A formal structure, including a secretariat or coordinating body such as the European Commission DG Enterprise, is needed to take ownership and drive the agenda as well as to facilitate these discussions. The specific activities could include regular online discussions and workshops such as those conducted for the current phase of the NICE Consumer project, as well as monitoring of progress against goals and targets.*
2. Fund, implement and collaborate on consumer awareness and behaviour change campaigns for sustainable fashion consumption
 - *Many examples of successful campaigns are included in the NICE Consumer research report. Successful campaigns exhibit the following success factors: partnerships comprised of government, civil society and industry, campaigns that target specific behaviour changes at the moment the behaviour takes place, and incentives to motivate change (including social pressure, financial incentives or intrinsic motivation). We see great possibility in conducting campaigns in retail stores, in homes and in workplaces that involve changing behaviours related to purchasing, washing and drying, and sharing and disposing of clothes to reduce negative impacts.*
3. Provide for collection of unwanted garments and contribute to the development of second-hand markets, recycling infrastructure and service/sharing business models
 - *The professionalisation of second-hand markets, the proliferation of service and sharing markets, and the expansion of garment take back and textile fibre recycling infrastructure are all clear opportunities to move toward closed-loop materials systems in the fashion industry.*



SUGGESTED INDUSTRY COMMITMENTS

The fashion industry can play a leading role to enable sustainable fashion consumption. A number of initiatives exist related to ethical sourcing and production, sustainable design and industry collaboration on product transparency standards. These represent an important foundation for expanded investment in sustainable business models for the fashion industry.

Below we present a set of commitments that we believe brands and retailers can support to enable sustainable fashion consumption.

1. Brands and retailers provide sustainability training and professional development opportunities to their employees, including designers, sourcing/production, marketing and advertising staff, and retail store staff
 - *Brands and retailers need employees who are knowledgeable about sustainability and that have the skills and tools to make decisions that support both financial success and sustainable consumption and production.*
2. Adopt standardised and credible methodologies for measuring product-level environmental and social impacts, and guidance for disclosing and communicating impacts to stakeholders, including customers, investors and media
 - *Large industry initiatives such as the Sustainable Apparel Coalition are working on standards for measuring and disclosing sustainability impacts. Companies should seek to adopt industry approaches, or when they are lacking, to share their approaches with their peers. As standards reach maturity, these should be the basis for policy making to ensure their ongoing credibility and impact.*
3. Improve care labels on products, and increase focus on consumer communication, education and motivation to promote responsible care
 - *Consumer care for garments comprises a large portion of the overall impact throughout a product's lifecycle. Most important is that the industry makes clothes that require little cleaning and washing, and clearly communicates this to consumers. The design of care labels and adherence to them should be improved to drive desired behaviours, such as washing less frequently, full loading for every cycle, washing at lower temperatures, and using line drying or low heat.*
4. Provide quality and longevity information about products, as well as warranties and servicing options
 - *The fashion industry needs innovative business models to remain competitive. Services such as warranties and repair services can accomplish both objectives.*
5. Engage with consumers on responsible disposal and invest in developing and supporting second-hand markets for garments and recovered materials
 - *Keeping garments in circulation longer can reduce impacts from producing new products. Second-hand shops need professionalisation to overcome negative attitudes toward previously worn products.*



GOVERNMENT POLICY OPTIONS

Government's role in encouraging sustainable fashion is one of setting the stage by:

- Providing the regulatory and economic framework within which the fashion industry operates
- Promoting trade and innovation that protects the environment and ensures respect for human rights and labor standards
- Ensuring that consumers are provided with accurate information and price signals

Below we present a set of policy options that we believe can be developed and adopted across the European Union, and potentially by governments in all developed countries.

1. Integrate sustainable fashion curriculum into primary, secondary, university and vocational education and research
 - *Primary and secondary education is a powerful vehicle to raise the awareness of future generations of consumers about the overall impacts of fashion production and consumption, and to teach basic skills (washing and repairing, for example) that will create good habits early on. University and trade education can help develop expert understanding of impacts and consumer behaviour, and industry management practices.*
2. Support, implement and/or fund consumer awareness and behaviour change campaigns
 - *Given that awareness among consumers is low, education and incentives will be needed to change behaviours. New engagement models for awareness raising and behaviour change need to be developed, including for instance nudging and gamification.*
3. Support standardisation of product transparency disclosures and drive consolidation of ecolabel(s) for fashion products
 - *The proliferation of sustainability labels has created a confusing landscape for consumers. At the same time, levels of disclosure about product impacts are low. A more robust standard for product transparency is needed for the industry as well as a consolidation of labels that are more accessible to consumers.*
4. Enforce guidelines for product communications and marketing to discourage and penalize greenwashing
 - *There is an overwhelming amount of noise about sustainable products in the market. Claims of "natural", "eco-" and "sustainable" are misleading. Government should enforce guidelines to prevent greenwashing to ensure credibility of product claims.*
5. Execute voluntary agreements with industry covering extended producer responsibility
 - *Government can play an important role in establishing legitimacy for industry initiatives. Government should participate in and support significant efforts to take back, recycle and upcycle garments and fibres.*
6. Explore and test economic incentives (such as tariffs, deposits, etc.) to internalize social and environmental costs of consumption and production
 - *The hidden cost of social and environmental impacts are currently externalised and invisible to consumers, and prices do not signal the true cost of products. A wide range of policies could be used to provide consumers with more and better incentives to make choices that are more sustainable, for example, collecting deposits at point of sale that can be recovered when selling or donating clothes to second-hand stores, or providing tax credits to retailers based on the amount of sustainable materials used in products.*
7. Restrict harmful substances
 - *Concern about chemicals and product safety continue to be a top concern for consumers. There are also significant environmental impacts associated with chemical use. Government should revisit the approach and effectiveness of policy related to chemical use in the fashion industry, including chemicals used in the fibre or garment production processes, no matter if they take place in the European Union or not. In addition, new technologies, such as nanotechnology and GMOs, should be thoroughly investigated to determine whether and to what extent they pose a risk to human health and the environment.*



POTENTIAL CIVIL SOCIETY COMMITMENTS

The role of civil society is often to create and communicate information and deviations from cultural norms and values. Certain groups act as watchdogs for consumers; others promote and nurture specific communities, lifestyles and sub-cultures; some create the foundations of knowledge; and others are intended to push industry to improve their standards and practices.

Below we present a set of actions that we believe civil society can take to steward the transition to sustainable fashion consumption.

1. Design and implement campaigns to raise consumer awareness of the environmental, social and economic impacts of fashion production and consumption and to influence and empower consumer behaviour changes
 - *The fashion industry, through seasonal collections and fashion shows, is currently oriented toward promoting fast and growing consumption. Civil society can raise awareness of the current model's origins and impacts and define changes that are needed to become more sustainable.*
2. Organise events for swapping and taking back unwanted garments
 - *NGOs are ideal partners to help collect garments and to gain support from the second-hand market.*
3. Participate in the drafting of industry standards and guidelines and government policy making
 - *The credibility of standards and guidelines often rests with watchdog NGOs who have a mission to serve the public interest.*
4. Contribute to and inform traditional media coverage of sustainable fashion consumption
 - *Fashion media play a major role in describing trends in the fashion industry, both to highlight good and bad practices, and in shaping how consumers think about the industry. The industry can be more transparent about its practices and the media can seek to highlight sustainable consumption solutions more effectively.*



We hope that the NICE Consumer project's first phase has inspired you to take action, both as an individual consumer, and as an empowered member of society who can influence the development of sustainable consumption.

The commitments contained in this document will be revised during Copenhagen Fashion Summit 2012 and then posted online where organisations can sign up to show their support for and commitment to sustainable fashion consumption.

The NICE Consumer project team hopes to continue our work of bringing stakeholders together, sharing good practices and shaping actions and policies to empower consumers. We also hope to begin large-scale campaigns to interact with consumers and showcase that sustainable fashion consumption is possible and happening today. We intend to continue to reach out via social media, online meetings and physical events to accelerate changes in the industry, and we encourage you to participate and shape the path of sustainable fashion consumption going forward.



The NICE Consumer project team would like to thank all the individuals who participated in research and public consultations. Your input was carefully considered in the development of the project outputs. Thank you for your time and attention and we look forward to your continued participation.

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NICE

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