RISE TO THE CHALLENGE: FASHION FOR GOOD



Since its launch two years ago, the Fashion for Good initiative has supported more than 60 innovators as they seek to develop solutions that help the apparel industry transition towards a circular model. Its latest endeavour, an interactive museum in the centre of Amsterdam, aims to encourage consumers to change their behaviour as well.

A force for good

'Take-make-waste'; that is Fashion for Good's far from flattering, though accurate, description of how the fashion and apparel industry operates at this time. Launched in 2017, the Amsterdam-based initiative's aim is to disrupt the long-accepted status quo and guide the sector towards a circular approach that is "restorative and regenerative by design".

At the core of its work is the Innovation Platform, through which it supports companies that are working on technologies and business models with the potential to speed up this transformation. So far, the areas it has targeted have included circular solutions for waste products, resale or rental platforms, methods for reducing water consumption, and techniques for tracing products or materials back to their source.

The platform is split into three components: an accelerator for start-ups; a scaling programme for companies looking to scale-up their solutions; and the soon-to-launch Good Fashion Fund, which will focus on raising capital for promising technologies. This final component is under development.

Eye for innovation

The 'Plug and Play Accelerator' is a 12-week programme designed for start-ups working in the areas of raw materials, dyeing and finishing, manufacturing, retail, end-of-use, or transparency and sustainability. Twice a year, ten to fifteen companies are invited to join the intensive programme after a thorough selection process.

Start-ups can independently submit an application to take part, but members of Fashion for Good's innovation and accelerator teams also visit trade fairs, universities and other institutions to actively seek them out. Those deemed promising are put into categories, before the initiative's corporate partners – which include adidas, C&A, Kering and PVH that manages brands including Tommy Hilfiger and Izod, and Target – vote on their preferred ideas.

Fashion for Good's communications manager, Anne-Ro Klevant Groen, tells *WSA* there have

The Fashion for Good Experience is located on Rokin 102, a major street that runs through the centre of Amsterdam.

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The Good Shop is the museum's on-site concept store, offering products from a selection of sustainability-minded brands.

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been "passionate" discussions between partners as they fight for a particular idea to make the cut. The exchanges between these important global corporations, which by their involvement have demonstrated a willingness to put aside their own needs for the good of the industry as a whole, can only be a positive thing, she says.

To demonstrate the scope of this programme, the intake for March this year included the creator of a new waterproof membrane material, a company that has developed a new dyeing method, a shoe recycling project, and a group that recycles textile offcuts and spinning waste. Among the notable graduates are Swedish sustainable dyeing specialist SpinDye, waterless cleaning and process solutions developer Tersus, and Flocus, which produces natural yarns, fillings and fabrics made from the fibres of the kapok tree.

The second component of the Innovation Platform is the scaling programme. It represents a longer-term commitment to selected innovators, who typically take part for one or two years. It is reserved for organisations with technologies that have the potential to bring about widespread change in the industry. They must have passed the proof of concept (POC) phase, with their selection determined by factors that include impact potential, scalability, maturity and business strategy.

Companies that have passed through the accelerator are eligible, providing they have demonstrated the feasibility of their ideas through pilot projects or investments. Those that make the cut are connected with manufacturers, brands and investors who can help them fast-track the implementation and adoption of their concepts or technology. They receive bespoke support to identify any barriers that would prevent successful scaling up and Fashion for Good helps them develop a 'roadmap to scale' for their business.

Alumni from this programme include Finnish bio-yarn producer Spinnova, that was supported in its efforts to scale-up production of its wood-based fibres. Clothing repair initiative The Renewal Workshop and SeaChange Technologies, which aims to remove effluent from the apparel manufacturing process, are currently enrolled.

Past, present, future

The Innovation Platform is a tool for driving circularity from an industry point of view, but what about the consumer? Real change will only be achieved when companies, governments and consumers are all on board with the process, as Ms Klevant Groen.

It is for this reason that the organisation has opened a museum in Amsterdam dedicated to sustainable and circular fashion and innovation. Announcing the 'Fashion for Good Experience', in last October, it said the goal was to "change the hearts and minds of visitors" by teaching them about how their clothes are made, how they can take action to consume in a more responsible manner, and how they themselves can have an impact on the fashion industry.

Located at its headquarters in the Dutch capital, the museum is split into three floors, with the past, present and future of the apparel industry represented on different levels. The basement charts the past, with a detailed timeline, from the late-1700s to the present day, chronicling how the sector arrived at its current position, where consumption goes seemingly unchecked and little care appears to be given to what happens to a product at the end of its life. Important events related to labour rights, environmental sustainability and innovation are

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highlighted on it.

There is an exhibit showing the complex process of designing, manufacturing and selling a cotton-polyester T-shirt. It discusses the environmental issues of the different stages of production, as well as the social implications. The human element of the apparel supply chain is further addressed by means of a short film about what daily life is like for the people working within it.

The present is the focus on the ground floor and it is here that the museum's concept store is located. Known as 'The Good Shop', it carries a collection of products based around a seasonal theme. A mix of international brands and up-and-coming labels are showcased, with the theme changing every four months. The first theme after the museum's launch last year was 'Splash: rethinking the role of water in fashion'. It featured pieces from adidas x Parley, Kings of Indigo and Ecoalf, among others.

At the start of February, a new theme, 'Naked: a transparent journey in fashion', took over. It focuses on the root that products go through before they reach the consumer and how difficult this is to trace. The brands invited to display their products were A.BCH, Allbirds, Asket, la fille d'O, Reformation and Swedish Stockings. They all have systems in place to trace the supply chain of their products.

'The Good Shop' will address the important issue of colour during its next cycle, covering dyestuffs made from natural materials, alternative dyeing methods and digital printing solutions. In terms of future themes, the organisation is open to suggestions, with it happy to be guided by industry input. The pace of change in the industry means themes could be re-addressed in the future without too much risk of repetition. What's more, this would offer an opportunity to examine if anything has really changed in the interim period.

On entering the museum, visitors are invited to take an RFID bracelet. As they walk around, they can pledge to introduce certain actions into the way they consume, based on what they are learning. By scanning the bracelet on interactive panels near different exhibits, they achieve 'badges' based on these pledges. They are split into five categories – consider, choose, use, reuse and activate. At the end of their visit, they receive a personalised 'action plan' based on their badges, which they can begin to implement once they leave. There is also the option to receive information about activities taking place at Fashion for Good that could help them achieve these goals.

The RFID bracelets are made from plastic recovered from the canals of Amsterdam. It is one example of how the organisation tried to practise what it preaches when building the museum. Others include decoration near the entrance made of Econyl recycled nylon yarns, wood panels sourced from sustainably managed forests, and the repurposing of materials from the launchpad exhibition that preceded the opening of the full museum.

A glimpse into the future, on the first floor, with the key feature being the Innovation Lounge, visitors can learn about the more than 50 innovators that Fashion for Good believes are going to disrupt the fashion industry. They are drawn from the database of companies that have taken part in the Innovation Platform. This gives visitors the chance to experience the ideas first-hand, for example, by seeing and touching some of the sustainable materials being developed. Smart devices in this area are loaded up with interviews with the entrepreneurs in charge of these business and with animated videos that offer a visual representation of how the technologies would work in practice.

Collaborative vision

Ms Klevant Groen states that the plan is for the museum to be permanently located in Amsterdam, although there is a possibility that certain elements of it could be taken on tour to other cities from 2020. The organisation hopes to hold some of the events that currently take place in-house, such as its 'Meet the Innovators' sessions, in other locations. Its target for 2020 is to bring in more sponsorships and donations so that it can expand on the educational workshops for school children that it already runs.

Away from the museum itself, the hub in Amsterdam has a vibrant co-working space which unites innovators from all over the world in one place. Those on the accelerator and scaling programmes can take up space there and many



The companies who have passed through Fashion for Good's accelerator and scaling programmes are showcased in the Innovation Lounge.

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The RFID bracelets, with which visitors can pledge to change their consumption habits, are made from recycled plastic.

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do, seeing it as an excellent opportunity to network and to work closely with like-minded individuals.

WSA met a number of those working with Fashion for Good during a visit to its headquarters. Among them was Beto Bina, co-founder of Brazil-based start-up FarFarm. His organisation aims to apply the principles of agroforestry to create sustainable fabrics that also contribute to the regeneration of nature and communities in its home country. He explained that the biggest advantage of being part of the accelerator programme is having access to knowledge about how to scale a business. He also stressed how positive it is to be able to interact with like-minded start-ups, especially those who are in a more advanced phase of their development and so are well-placed to offer advice on how to overcome some of the common challenges of scaling up.

Christian van Maaren, co-founder of the Excess Materials Exchange (EME), a digital platform that facilitates the repurposing of excess or waste materials from a range of industries, has praised Fashion for Good for its willingness to allow the start-ups on its programmes to follow their own path, rather than over-managing their progress. He added that it has also given EME exposure to partners that could help its business grow in the future.

The sense of collective at the co-working space is clear. Fashion for Good has emphasised how important this community of innovative thinkers is to its overall mission. Those working there are encouraged to engage with each other as much as possible, even if that is through an act as simple as sitting down together to eat lunch. Such an environment is certainly conducive to the generation of new ideas, which will surely be crucial if the initiative is to achieve its goal of shifting the fashion and apparel industry to a circular model.

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