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<https://esg.ugebrev.dk/sektioner/csr-ledelse-strategi/global-fashion-agenda-vildleder-om-baeredygtighed/>

Global Fashion Agenda misinforms about sustainability

The company behind the Copenhagen Fashion Summit, Global Fashion Agenda, is now being criticized for deliberately misleading companies and customers about sustainability. Global Fashion Agenda, in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group, publishes a report each year describing the fashion industry's sustainability situation. But nearly 400 scientists from around the world have gathered in critiquing the Global Fashion Agenda for recommend business-as-usual, an ailing system, based on over-consumption and a desperate hunt for profit.

Almost 400 international researchers from "The Union of Concerned Researchers in Fashion" (UCRF) has criticized the Danish-based company Global Fashion Agenda, with CEO Eva Kruse at the forefront, for deliberately disregard of the core issues in the fashion and textile industry. The criticism claims that the Global Fashion Agenda deliberately ignores the fact that sustainability in the fashion industry can only come about through a systemic challenge of the increasing over-consumption, and industry's eternal and desperate pursuit of economic growth through overproduction at the lowest possible price. Global Fashion Agenda, which is financially supported by eg. Bestseller, H&M, Ganni, NIKE and G-STAR RAW, in collaboration with the consulting firm Boston Consulting Group, publish an annual report on the fashion industry's sustainable status. The report "The Pulse of the Fashion Industry" begins with the realization that at "despite this improvement, the fashion industry is still far from sustainable."

According to a statement dated June 24th from the UCRF, Global Fashion Agenda recommends completely wrong routes to a more sustainable future. At best, they only create small, local sustainable improvements in the value chain, but do not solve any real climate problems, for example described in the IPCC's latest report on climate change or in the UN's SDG number 12 on sustainable consumption. UCRF writes that "while the language used in the Pulse 2019 Update invokes 'systemic change', the discrete recommendations appear to be located comfortably within a current and unquestioned growth logic and therefore serve business-as-usual over planet. UCRF suggests that a genuine systems-thinking approach be adopted for future reports."

Danish researchers agree with the criticism

Among the researchers who have added their signature to the criticism, is Danish associate professor Else Skjold from Design School Kolding. "We believe that GFA's reports are misleading and on several points the companies are being misled. They did this in 2017, by recommending increased use of synthetic fibers in clothing production, which is highly problematic in relation to the discharge of microplastic and poor quality during the use phase. They do this again in the current report by focusing on so-called sustainable fashion and not on sustainable consumption and use of clothing - an area that according to the last 10 years of research could actually transform the sector," says Else Skjold. The recommended solutions from the Global Fashion Agenda are also criticized from the Danish side for addressing only the symptoms and only looking for sustainable solutions that at the same time uphold the industry's business model based on the idea of many and large clothing collections produced at the lowest possible price.

"We researchers can no longer be silent witnesses to the Global Fashion Agenda's 'cherry picking' from our knowledge and only using that which supports a traditional fashion thinking, and thus a linear business model," says Else Skjold. Postdoc researcher, BioTextile at Aarhus University, Birgit E. Bonefeld also supports the criticism. "Brands must act and orientate themselves towards sustainable solutions and not just sustainable materials, where the manufacturing phase is in focus. Sustainability must therefore be in a life-cycle perspective," says Birgit E. Bonefeld. She also encourages the industry to engage in retraining schemes and intangible solutions that could change the corporate culture of the fashion industry. "Intangible solutions must be included as part of the business model to slow down the promotion of 'new is good'," she says. Vigga Svensson - a well-known face in the fashion industry - and CEO of the company Continued.Fashion, whose business model is precisely based on take-back schemes and reselling, also supports the criticism.

"The criticism from UCRF confirms our experience when we try to help fashion brands to work on circular business models. There is simply no terminology or scale that can handle a linear (over-) consumption. This applies to everyone, from the marketing department, who is unsure of how to communicate with their customers, unless it is just buy-as-much-as-possible, to the CFO who does not understand how to report and handle stock in a circular set up. In other words, "we continue to see a great desire for, but also a tremendous confusion around, new and more sustainable business models - so much so that the fashion industry can justify continuing with its inappropriate business model in the face of this knowledge," says Vigga Svensson.

Global Fashion Agenda's response to the criticism

In connection with the criticism, *Økonomisk Ugebrev Ledelse* has submitted a number of questions to Global Fashion Agenda's director Eva Kruse. The questions address the criticism from the UCRF and deal with: 1. The acceptance of over-consumption as a business model. 2. Consciously confusing of concepts. 3. A simplified view of consumers. 4. Whether the report is based solely on the prosperity of "the Global North" and does not include the less affluent in "the Global South?" We have received the following short answer from Morten Lehmann, Chief Sustainability Officer, Global Fashion Agenda: "The results in The Pulse of Fashion Industry 2019 Update are based on projecting the consequences of increasing demand from growing middle classes and over-consumption in the fashion industry. The rates shown in the report are retrieved from Euromonitor data. For consumers' emotional analysis, over 2,900 consumers were interviewed from a wide range of markets in both the global north and the global south, including Brazil, China, France, the United Kingdom and the United States."