

Fabric headlines

TEXT: SOPHIE BRAMEL

1. Denim

Vertical integration, a defining feature of the denim and jeans industry, continues strongly. Global denim manufacturer Saitex has opened its first denim making factory in Vietnam. In Europe, reshoring is in the works as new jeans making facilities are coming out of the ground and denim fabric makers diversify to offer brands garment making services.

SAITEX OPENS DENIM FABRIC MILL

Vietnam-based jeans specialist Saitex has invested in the construction of a brand-new denim mill. Located 40 minutes away from its cut & sew factory near Ho Chi Minh City, it claims a production capacity of 24 million meters per year. True to



SAITEX WEAVING MILL

its B Corp and bluesign certifications, the facility harnesses the most sustainable practices, including

LEED Gold Certified construction materials, solar panels, and advanced filtration and collecting systems that will allow the mill to operate without using freshwater. “It has been our long-term vision to close the loop on our operations. With the opening of the mill and the launch of our textile upcycling facility, Stelapop, our vision will be complete,” said Saitex CEO and founder, Sanjeev Bahl.

ARTISTIC MILLINERS' BEYOND DENIM ARTMILL

In response to market demand for versatility and performance, Artistic Milliners, a Pakistan-based vertically integrated denim manufacturer, is creating a new textile division, Artmill, which will develop innovative and sustainable premium woven fabrics. The facility, whose annual capacity is said to be 25 million metres, is powered by renewable energy and equipped with water and chemical recycling systems, making it the first LEED Platinum certified piece-dye mill in the region. “In the past few years, the expectation for comfort, performance and aesthetics in a single item has steadily risen. Artmill is ready to put horsepower behind the development of clothing that meets this moment,” said Omer Ahmed, Artistic Milliners and Artmill CEO.

NEW JEANS-MAKING FACILITIES IN FRANCE

Thanks in part to state-led funding programmes, new denim making facilities are opening in France. Family-owned Atelier Tuffery is investing €5.5 million over the next three years to triple the size of its historical headquarters located in Florac, in the south of France. It will have 2,000 square meters dedicated to production. Based Rupt-sur-Moselle, in the east, denim fabric maker Tissage de France has earmarked €100,000 to expand into next-generation equipment jeans making. It plans to be able to produce some 100,000 jeans per year for its owner, sustainable denim brand 1083, and others. The FashionCube Denim Centre, an Industry 4.0 jeans making facility set up by a group of Mulliez owned brands, began operating this year. Based in Neuville-en-Ferrain, in the North, the facility is equipped with Factor-Hit machinery made by Sip Italy. Its stated production capacity is 400,000 items per year.



OFFICINA +39 AQUALESS MISSION GARMENT

OFFICINA +39'S MISSION TO 'FADE' WATER CONSUMPTION

Innovative Italian chemicals company Officina +39 is adding a new, low impact fading solution to its series of eco-processes known as 'Aqualess Mission'. Aqualess Fade promises to replicate the bleaching effect of chlorine without harmful chemicals and using less water. It joins the company's Novascraper Indigo, a laser finishing technique that adds a vintage look

to denim garments; Aqualess Aged, a waterless compound that creates abrasion effects on denims, and Oz-One Powder, which replaces traditional bleaching with an eco-friendly alternative to create worn-in and distressed looks. Combined, these solutions can reduce water use in garment laundry processes by 75%, the company says.

2. Fashion

Sustainability remains a key focus for fashion brands and suppliers that seek to reduce the impact of their activities. These strategies can go from monitoring all impacts across all processes, as seen at Eurojersey, to reducing microfibre shedding, as seen at Brugnoli, and to up-and-coming designers and labels that embracing eco-friendly raw materials.

EUROJERSEY PROCLAIMS "FAI WE CAN"

Italian warp knitter Eurojersey has partnered with Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano (FAI) to support the Villa Panza in Varese, known for its centuries-old park and contemporary American art collection. Using the acronym as a verb, Eurojersey has named this new partnership "FAI WE CAN" in which "CAN" also stands for "Culture Art Nature", encapsulating the shared values and substance of this initiative. The Varese-based company, headquartered in Caronno Pertusella, seeks to bring together different environments and sectors sharing common values to pool resources and skills to build something that makes a difference, it says. Since 2007, the company has invested in a responsible manufacturing platform it calls SensitivEcoSystem. It covers every aspect of the company's activities and extends beyond its own boundaries to contribute to a culture of environmental responsibility at all levels.



EUROJERSEY

BRUGNOLI INTRODUCES ECO H2O RANGE

Though polyamide is less prone than other fibres to microplastic pollution, it remains a pressing issue for eco-sustainable companies. To contribute to protecting the oceans and their fauna, Italian mill Brugnoli is introducing ECO H2O, a fabric range made from an innovative polyamide yarn developed by Nilit, Sensil BioCare, which is engineered to reduce the persistence of textile waste in the environment. The new range features three references, a flat jersey for intimates, a tech fabric for sports and swimwear, and a 3D structure for tops and swimwear. Another new reference developed by Brugnoli pairs Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) cotton with Lycra Adaptiv to deliver comfort and performance in everyday apparel.

MODA MAKERS MODENA MEET-UP IN MAY

Top small and medium-sized Italian fashion manufacturers will be presenting their new collections at the 13th edition of Moda Makers, which will be held at ModenaFiere from May 10 to 12, 2022. The women's ready-to-wear event is now recognised as part of the official international trade show calendar and is set in the fashion valley of Emilia-Romagna. Italian manufacturers of high quality tailored ready-to-wear garments, knitwear, cut and sew knitwear, shirts, blouses and outerwear will be presenting their S/S 2023 collections.



ROICA DELIVERS ELASTICITY FOR ALL PURPOSES

Roica, an elastane yarn produced by Japanese conglomerate Asahi Kasei, is seeing its reach expand to all markets as an extensive network of designers and companies are using the high tech and sustainable yarn in their products. These include sustainable streetwear brand Duarte, created by Portuguese designer Ana Duarte who won the C.L.A.S.S. Icon Award in 2021. Her latest collection, presented at White Milano, features a unisex panelled coat and trousers set made from ReLAST, an eco-textile developed by Candiani Denim in a blend of organic



GREEN COLLECTION BY SARAH BORGHİ FOR ROICA

cotton and Roica EF, Asahi Kasei's recycled elastane yarn. Italian luxury hosiery brand Sarah Borghi, manufactured and marketed by Gizeta Calze, is on a mission to disrupt traditional hosiery with its 'Green Collection' featuring Roica stretch yarns. French sustainable intimate apparel label Nénés Paris has chosen a lace made by Roica partner Iluna Group that combines a regenerated nylon, Q-Nova, with recycled elastane Roica EF.

3. Fibres & yarns

Demand for plant-based raw materials continues to drive innovation in man-made cellulosic fibres. New players, such as HeiQ with AeoniQ, are entering the market, as featured in View #137. Lenzing, the world's largest producer of fibres derived from wood pulp is expanding capacity for its Tencel lyocell and seeing growing interest for its Tencel Luxe platform.

NEW MILESTONES FOR TENCEL

Tencel, the 'flagship' textile brand of Austrian cellulosic fibre producer Lenzing, celebrates three decades of sustainable fibre innovation this year. Developed in 1992, the lyocell fibre ushered in a new era for manmade cellulosic fibres with regards to performance, aesthetics and sustainability. To address the growing demand for high-end fibre, the group has expanded the production capacity of its lyocell manufacturing plant in Thailand to 100,000 tonnes per year. The filament version of the yarn, which Lenzing markets as Tencel Luxe, is another bright spot on the company's roster of achievements. Available in counts going from 40 to 160 dtex, the multifilament continuous yarn first invested woven applications and is now being used in knits where it provides jerseys with a silk-like hand feel. This is, the company says, yet another sign of the ongoing success of its lyocell yarns.



LENZING TENCEL

NAIA ENTERS LOUNGEWEAR

US-based Eastman is expanding the scope of its branded acetate yarn Naia with a new offering of staple yarns. "We first launched Naia in filament form as its lustre, drape and elegance are ideally suited to the growing eco-luxury, mid to high-end market," says Ruth Farrell, recently promoted to the position of general manager for Eastman's textiles business. Staple yarns target casual end uses, such as loungewear, she goes on to explain. Fabrics developed by Eastman partner mills include

sweater feels, comfort fabrics and textiles for athleisure. The low pilling, high dimensional stability and ease of care properties of Naia help make garments last and look good for longer.

GHEZZI PRESENTS A 'SEASONLESS' SUSTAINABLE COLLECTION

Founded in 1949 and based in Lombardy, advanced spinning company Ghezzi has recently joined international textile eco hub C.L.A.S.S. As part of its commitment to sustainable practices, it is introducing its first 'Seasonless' collection, a series of references unrelated to any specific season or trend that include yarns made from traditional fibres such as viscose and acetate, Micro Tencel and Micro Modal combined with Bemberg cupro, silk or stretch yarns, along with Tencel Luxe, bamboo, recycled polyester or recycled polyamide. Ghezzi's focus on quality, technological and environmental progress has also led to the creation of the brand-new viscose yarn, VIS2LIFE, made from 5% RCS-certified post-consumer regenerated cellulose pulp obtained from used clothing and 95% cellulose pulp carrying FSC certification.



NAIA SUSTAINABLE ACETATE

ERRATUM

In the Fabric Headlines of View Issue 137, page 80), Asahi Kasei's Bemberg yarn was described as a cupro viscose. Cupro is a man-made cellulose fibre, as is viscose, but it is made from cotton linter pre-consumer material, converted through a traceable and transparent closed-loop process, and not from wood pulp. Asahi Kasei is the world's only producer of this high quality manmade cellulosic fibre that it markets under the brand name Bemberg. This one-of-a-kind fibre is certified RCS, Oeko-Tex Standard 100 and ISO 14001.

4. Recycling

Agricultural waste, plastic waste and assorted deadstock leftover from apparel manufacturing are considered valuable resources for the innovative companies and start-ups that are rethinking supply chains and paving the way to a greener textile industry.

CIRCULAR SYSTEMS JOINS C.L.A.S.S.

C.L.A.S.S., an international eco-hub that advocates for a more sustainable fashion industry, now counts US-based eco-innovative company Circular Systems among its key partners. Circular Systems is developing a series of circular and regenerative technologies to transform waste into fibres, yarns and fabrics for the apparel industry. With its textile-waste-to-fibre Texloop and food-crop-waste BioFibre Agraloop platforms, it says it provides scalable solutions for the circular economy derived from two abundant waste streams. The company's recycled cotton Texloop yarns and Agraloop BioFibre are suitable for conventional yarn spinning systems. Its patent-pending hybrid yarn spinning technology Orbital is engineered to make fibres from used garments or agricultural waste in blends with organic or recycled fibres.



CIRCULAR SYSTEMS - C.L.A.S.S.: TEXLOOP

BREAKTHROUGH FOR CARBIOS

France-based Carbios has developed an innovative enzymatic recycling process first created to recycle PET plastics and that now includes polyester textiles. It claims to have achieved a new milestone by regenerating "the first white PET fibre enzymatically recycled from coloured textile waste". This breakthrough represents a big step forward, as it is estimated that two-thirds of the 90 million tonnes of PET produced globally every year are used to manufacture polyester fibres. These can be recycled but are generally 'downcycled', whereas the C-Zyme process developed by Carbios is said to produce recycled material equivalent to virgin quality. The technology is set to scale up as the company has partnered with Indorama Ventures to build the first industrial-scale bio-enzymatic PET recycling facility in Longlaville, in the East of France. The plant will have a processing capacity of some 50,000 tonnes of post-consumer PET waste per year.

VF GROUP INVESTS IN HKRITA'S GREEN MACHINE

US-based VF Group, the owner of outdoor and sports brands including The North Face and Vans, has joined a consortium of companies seeking to establish the industrial-scale feasibility of "The Green Machine," a recycling technology that separates cotton from polyester in blended fabrics developed by Hong Kong research centre HKRITA. The consortium has invested in an industrial scale facility located in Cambodia, now the world's ninth-largest garment producer where some 60% of its industrial waste is due to apparel manufacturing. The Green Machine's hydrothermal process combines heat, water and a biodegradable chemical to separate cotton from polyester.



THE GREEN MACHINE

NEW BUSINESS MODELS FOR DEADSTOCK

Reducing waste generated by the apparel industry is inspiring a new cohort of start-ups that seek to fix some of the blind spots in garment manufacturing. Cutting and sewing operations are estimated to generate between 20 and 30% unused fabric, entire bolts of excess fabric end up as deadstock, and trimming supplies are another source of waste. The start-ups working in this field are focusing first on the task of assessing excess supplies. These are then put up for sale on a marketplace or recycled into new materials. French start-up Weturn collects fabric scraps at cut-and-sew facilities to recycle them into yarn; Nona Source and Adapta manage luxury brand deadstock, and Uptrade does not stock unused goods, but tracks them. "At times we have tens or even hundreds of thousands of metres of unused fabric. These are not only bits and pieces," says Uptrade founder Eleonore Rothley.



WETURN

5. Accessories

Acutely aware of the deleterious impacts of poorly made products, accessories manufacturers seek to promote desirability and durability. A high-quality garment or accessory will be worn and cared for longer, they insist, and can be a part of a virtuous cycle as opposed to low-quality products.

LABAM FOCUSES ON DURABILITY

Italian fashion accessories manufacturer Labam believes in the power of creativity and responsibility to make accessories that will be cherished and worn for years. In its newest 'Green' ranges, the company uses materials made from post-consumer plastic waste and biopolymers derived from natural sources. It points out that these are ethically manufactured in its factory that offers safe working conditions and decent pay. The race to the bottom has a social and ecological impact, it insists. "Low-quality accessories are replaced more quickly and at times considered disposable. This means that their price does not reflect their true cost as it does not take into account the carbon footprint related to more production, more transport and more landfill," the company says.



LABAM® HIGH FASHION ACCESSORIES CREATION®

LAMPA EXPANDS ECO-RANGES

The first B Corp-certified company in its sector, Italian fashion accessories manufacturer Lampa Group continues to demonstrate its commitment to sustainable practices and technological innovation with the integration of four high-tech and environmental-friendly materials. The company's new collection features three sustainable polyamides: a second life nylon obtained from the recycling of industrial waste generated during manufacturing processes, Aquafil's recycled nylon Econyl, and a bio-based polyamide derived from castor oil. The fourth new green raw material is a recycled Perspex, or PMMA, made from non-reusable waste.

VARCOTEX PUSHES ITS SUSTAINABLE THINKING

In its mission to promote 'zero km' manufacturing, Carpi-based label manufacturer Varcotex has pledged to cutting its energy consumption by investing in modern machinery and has begun to offset its CO2 emissions. Its commitment to reducing the environmental impact of its products is highlighted in its Biolabel range of fully recyclable, plastic-free and 100% biodegradable labels made from an FSC-certified organic compound that is silky soft, hypoallergenic and breathable. The HeartEarth series is based on natural materials including nettle and linen, cellulose paste, organic cotton, paper and faux leather made from apple waste, maize or pineapple leaves. Their rough and crisp aesthetics are used to evoke a neo-Amish farm.

CADICA CAPTURES THE SENSES

True to its vision to be a source of inspiration for its customers and to be a reference in terms of creativity, research, quality and service, Carpi-based Cadica Group highlights the key role its creative director Alejandro Espinosa Caballero plays in its design process. Born in Mexico and trained in England, the millennial designer has been working for Cadica since 2010. "In collaboration with my creative team and thanks to Cadica's advanced machinery and technology, we are able to create avant-garde collections that drive trends all over the world," he says. The designer goes on to stress the strength of Cadica's Made in Italy label, a guarantee of quality and refinement that goes well beyond the frontiers of the country. He draws his inspiration from the diverse stimuli that strike his senses everyday. These, he says, can be as simple and delightful as a croissant in Paris.



ERRATUM

In our Contemporary Womenswear (View #137, pages 128/129, Transcend accessories), we incorrectly credited picture 5 to Texcart. The correct company is EMMETEX. We apologise for the confusion and inconvenience caused.

6. The trade show scenario

Touch and go in December and January, the textile trade shows that eventually took place during February can all be hailed as successful – if not commercially, then certainly as a morale-boosting exercise.

No matter what inroads digital marketplaces have made during the Covid crisis, there is no doubt that the desire to return to physical shows proved stronger. So strong indeed, that fair organisers in Milan and Florence, with the support of their exhibitors, went against regional administrations, preferring to chance their arm and hold the shows behind a wall of stringent vaccination regulations. The results in terms of both exhibitors and visitors more than vindicated their choice.

At Milano Unica, Fieramilano Rho, 342 participating companies (+27% over the last edition, with 290 Italian and 52 foreign companies) showcased their collections to 3,600 companies (+16% overall, with a considerable increase in the number of foreign companies (+35% total, with the UK +195%, the Netherlands +70%, Poland +29%, the US +26.5% and France +14%).

‘The result of the 34th edition is certainly reflected by the increased number of exhibitors, and also by the changed mood in the market,’ commented Alessandro Barberis Canonico, president of Milano Unica. ‘The recovery in

consumer spending, the reduced pressure of the pandemic, and improved sales have given an injection of confidence both to the increasing number of exhibitors and buyers looking for new stimuli for their collections.’

The same positivity was also felt at the Stazione Leopolda where the 90th Pitti Filati attracted 1,750 buyers, almost 35% coming from abroad, from over 40 countries led by France, the UK, the US, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Spain. ‘We thank our exhibitors, the 80 companies who have trusted us also at this Pitti edition, the buyers and journalists who have arrived in Florence to discover the latest news,’ said Raffaello Napoleone, CEO of Pitti Immagine. ‘We discovered once again their and our desire to restart, to network and find common solutions for the benefit of the entire fashion supply chain, also by learning from the extraordinary experiences that we all had to face.’

Première Vision welcomed 21,300 visitors to its Villepinte show (+24% on September 2021) with the number of British and Spanish visitors doubling, and increases in the number of Turkish and US visitors, despite local Covid restrictions that continued to have a negative effect on Far Eastern visitors, especially from the PRC, Korea, and Japan. Interestingly the number of exhibitors at its joint physical (998) and virtual (63) shows increased to 1,080, of which 63 were new. Out of



THE ECORESORT TREND AREA AT MILANO UNICA



that total, 299 companies were Italian and 189 French but a substantial 187 came from Turkey – and 40 from the PRC, which raised some eyebrows (see below)

Young people, education, and sustainability were at the centre of the 57th edition of Filo, the postponed International Exhibition of Yarns and Fibres held at the end of February at MiCo, Milan. ‘During the fair, which closed with great results, we have gone through two intense days, rich in inspiration and debate,’ reported Paolo Monfermoso, manager of the show. ‘Our trend areas – from the general one to “un figlio per la maglia” to the sustainability area with FiloFlow – represented the focus for buyers’ visits, while “dialoghi di confronto” dealt with essential issues for this industry, such as education and sustainability.’

But although morale was high, the commercial situation was uncertain. As we report in our Publishers View (pages 18-19), manufacturers are facing a triple whammy, with rises in raw material costs, transport, and energy costs for processes from dyeing to finishing. No wonder caution was the name of the game, with buyers and manufacturers all heading to plains rather than fancies, updated classics and trans-seasonal or versatile qualities that could be fed into multiple merchandise programmes. And with speculation on raw materials rife (see the linen story below) the bigger companies with cash to buy ahead hold most of the trumps at the moment.

Covid only postponed a deep rift in the trade show agenda that would have become apparent in July 2020, when Première Vision brought forward its traditional September showing in direct confrontation with the timing of Milano

Unica. The plan has caused a great deal of heart-searching among Italian exhibitors whose design nous, they consider, is the main attraction of most textile trade shows. Two years ago, some leading names decided not to attend the proposed new July PV, exhibiting only in Milan – a game plan that they stuck to during the pandemic when US, Chinese and Far Eastern visitors were scarce on the ground and PV decided to fill its halls with many more Turkish and Chinese companies, which, it was felt, brought down the level of creativity and exclusivity that the show had always stood for.

Meanwhile, the Munich shows largely suspended from mid-2020 due to local Government precautions are back with us. Comments Sebastian Klinder, Managing Director Munich Fabric Start, ‘After two very challenging years that required not only flexibility but also solidarity, we will finally return to what we love to do most: organising our trade shows in the well-known way at the familiar dates in Munich. The next VIEW Premium Selection from 21 – 22 June 2022 is already fully booked. The demand for the upcoming Munich Fabric Start from 30 – 31 August 2022 together with the Bluezone and the Keyhouse is very high. This confirms the need for and the correct timing of our consecutive trade shows. With a fully blocked show calendar in July and summer holidays in the US, both at the same time, we feel like there is a big chance for us to present the most recent material innovations at our stand-alone show dates in Munich. Moreover, we have big plans to expand as we will open a dedicated new hall and concept for the Sourcing area to answer the market needs in this currently shifting segment.’

Indeed, what will happen this July (PV, 5-7 July, is being held one week earlier than MU, 12-14 July) is not clear. Much will depend on the number of visitors from the US and the PRC, and where they decide to work. However, VIEW has always argued that although the early July dates (showing A/W 23/24) make sense for multiple retailers and chain stores who need to plan Far Eastern production, they do not suit everyone. Why not move the shows back to their old dates in September or even October when collections are complete and last-minute ideas in place – especially now that companies are re-shoring and rethinking supply lines and schedules? Well, that’s what Première Vision is partly doing with its latest Fashion Rendezvous, planned for 7-8 September 2022 at the Carreau du Temple, Paris.

THE LINEN RUSH

One of the fibre areas creating the biggest interest for S/S 2023 is linen. Wherever you went, from Milan to Paris, it didn’t take much to see where the busiest stands were – those with pure or blended linen to offer. Part of this linen rush is due to the desire for heritage and a fresh touch, the rest lies in its sustainability credentials. The problem is that European flax

< The trade show scenario

(grown in northern France, Belgium and the Netherlands) is limited in quantity, with harvests vulnerable to drought and climate change, and just two operational spinners in Europe at the moment: Linificio & Canapificio Nazionale in Italy and the smaller Safilin in France.

It's a traditional business so regular linen weavers such as Libeco have their supplies covered, but extra orders are not guaranteed. No surprise, then, that deliveries for irregulars and newcomers are out to November and no one is sure of prices. The situation is further complicated by the pandemic-induced boom in the home furnishing and interior business over the past two years, which has pushed up demand by 20%, and the uncertainty of the Chinese linen market, where prices and deliveries are insecure due to home market demand and protectionism

To ease the situation, two new spinning mills are planned to come on stream this year – one for the interior market and another from Sofinal in Béthune, northern France. Trials are also going on to bring flax growing to parts of northern Italy. There is even talk of reintroducing hemp (canapa in Italian), much easier to grow than linen and once a big player in the



THE FILO FLOW SUSTAINABILITY AREA

Italian economy in the 1920s and 30s, although that would require the total rebuilding of infrastructure to support hemp production.

EVALUATING SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability, of course, continues to underpin European textile thinking and shows have been busy expanding their coverage with Filo, for example, now launching the Filo Flow project encompassing 59 companies – 51% of the total exhibitors. As good as that sounds, there are still issues surrounding its complexity and effectiveness.

First and foremost, suspicions of greenwashing are rampant, especially at the budget end of the market, where aggressive pricing seems to preclude truly socially responsible or sustainable paths. The issue is aggravated by downward

pressure from buyers with a 'take it or leave it' approach to shared responsibility: 'We want to have sustainable products with sustainable labelling, but you, the manufacturers, have to sort it out and pay the extra costs involved.'

Then there is the whole complexity of certification. There are countless organisations offering control and award services both for CSR and sustainable processing routes – so many that the industry, let alone consumers, is confused by the plethora of labels, names and determinants being used. Companies seeking certification complain bitterly about the convolutedness of the administration, the paperwork, and the complexity of finding downstream information. And then there's the cost: €500-1,000 per article renewed on an annual basis (depending on the depth and breadth of the search, some have been known to spend up to €0,000). Who should foot the bill is one question. Where all the profits go is another. Also, sustainability in textiles seems to have become a one-horse race, with 'recycling' the apparent answer to everything. It's not: but life-cycling is! If a product is biodegradable, you don't need to recycle it.

The European Commission has been busily promoting the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) method, which can be used to give a clear Life Cycle Assessment (LCA). This replicable, systematic framework, put together by leading industry players and built around 16 'impacts' that include climate change, land use, ozone depletion and human health, aims to 'harmonise' the way environmental impact is calculated – not just for textiles but for all consumer goods, to facilitate the EU's planned ecological transition. Following assessment, a product is awarded a score from 1 (excellent) to 5 (poor). Linen, for example, has a 1.6 rating (very high) with low impacts in water use (2%) and eutrophication (water pollution from nutrient-rich runoff, 1%) but high in land use (39%) because of the agricultural and plant origin of flax. If this process is made obligatory (which the Commission is pushing for), then we might finally have one system to work with, and a simple 1-5 grade system that consumers can judge.

We are already seeing more regulatory proposals from the EEC concerning environmental and social programmes. In February, the European Commission proposed a law that would make large companies operating in the EU check that their suppliers around the world respect environmental standards and do not use slave or child labour. The corporate sustainability due diligence directive will also oblige directors of European Union firms to ensure that their business strategy aligns with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, as agreed under the Paris climate agreement.

THE YOUTH FACTOR

On the surface, everything seems to be going well in Italy. Milan Fashion Week was packed, with Fendi, Prada, Versace

and other mainstays joined by Bottega Veneta, Gucci and a handful of other holdouts that used the pandemic's disruption to experiment with alternative forms to the conventional fashion show. Even Armani returned. The biggest brands, it seems, are riding a collective hot streak, with the latest shows building momentum for another year of record sales. But there are some very big cracks in the Italian fashion system – namely persuading more young people to work in the country's textile and apparel industry.

The real challenge, argues Giovanni Brugnoli, vice-president of Confindustria with responsibility for human capital, is 'training youth to acquire adequate skills and competencies that are in line with their desires, but also with the entrepreneurial model typical of our country, which is the second largest manufacturer in Europe after Germany. We must help youth and their families discover the work opportunities offered by our companies, grasping and communicating the value, both cultural and social, of factory work, which has changed a great deal compared to the past.'

Brugnoli was speaking at the opening ceremony of Milano Unica, where he was discussing the employment problem with fellow industry leaders who included Alessandro Barberis Canonico; Carlo Maria Ferro, president of the Italian Trade Agency; Cirillo Marcolin, president of Confindustria Moda; Sergio Tamborini, president of Sistema Moda Italia; Paolo Bastianello, president of the Confindustria Moda education committee; Roberto Peverelli, president of TAM Network; and Francesco Ferraris, president of Sistema Moda Italia's youth group.

The discussion was echoed at Filo, where the theme was 'Believe in young people', and the round table and speakers featured Paolo Monfermoso, manager of Filo; Pier Francesco

Corcione, president of ITS-TAM Biella; Francesco Ferraris, president of the Gruppo Giovani Imprenditori (young entrepreneurs' group) at Sistema Moda Italia; Marco Cardinalini of Cardinalini & C; Alessia Crivelli of Crivelli Gioielli, vice president of Confindustria Federorafi); Chiara Marconi and Federica Tirani of Chité Milano; and Silvia Moglia, director of ITS-TAM Biella.

Italy's textile and apparel industries employ 570,000 people, but the young do not want to be part of that. Even in specialist textile areas, where there is high unemployment, the picture is the same. Take Biella, where industry is looking to fill 2,100 posts but is still struggling with 1,600 openings, in an area where 3,500 people are unemployed, 2,000 of them under the age of 40 (companies are reluctant to employ workers of over 50 because they are more expensive with high social costs).

Being part of a big brand is one thing, but working in industry just isn't seen as glamorous. Unlike IT or media, it's perceived as old fashioned and 'dirty' – not necessarily in physical terms, but in the way textiles and clothing are seen to pollute the planet. Also, many of the young, witnesses to how their parents and neighbours lost their livelihoods in the offshoring and textile downturn that started in the 1990s, have seen how uncertain the industry can be.

This is also about weak educational planning. Italy's higher-education schools have concentrated on art/design and commercial elements rather than production. The country does have higher technical institutes (istituto tecnico superiore, ITS), but they attract only 21,000 students per year, compared with the 530,000 students in Germany (where about 60% of school leavers join the apprenticeship system, which covers over 340 trades). The ITS system has been in existence for over 10 years in Italy, but no one really thought about it until prime minister Mario Draghi started to talk about it last year.

Now ears are pricking up. Some companies are already approaching school leavers, inviting them to join company-based courses and later employing them. For example, the Marchi & Fildi group, among other Biella companies, invites ITS-TAM students to participate in knit and design programmes, courses on dyeing and spinning in its laboratories, and to internships in its production departments. Prato is expected to open the country's first university of textiles soon. This would be a huge step, one that would echo in textiles what the Germans have done with their 17 world-famous technical universities that specialise in engineering and related subjects. A German engineering degree enjoys an excellent reputation worldwide: imagine the kudos a 'made in Italy' textile degree would confer!

DAVID R SHAH



STUDENTS FROM ITS TAM FOLLOWING KNITTING COURSES WITH MARCHE & FILDI GROUP