

The Thinking Watermill Society | August 2021

# Interview with Ms Gaia Novello &

Ms Gloria De Lazzari  
(Founders at Zummy — Italy)



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# Introduction

**Zummy** is a female-founded brand that derives its name from a desire to have a loving outlook on nature by enhancing and protecting it.

Gaia and Gloria established Zummy as a sustainable and ethical fashion brand inspired by the beauty of underwater nature in the Polynesian Ocean.

In this interview, The Thinking Watermill Society learns more about the sustainable side of the phrase "Made in Italy".



1. You are the founders of an awe-inspiring fashion brand, Zummy, which is clearly an all-around sustainable and ethical fashion brand. What motivated the establishment of Zummy as a green fashion idea that brings new meaning to the phrase “Made in Italy”?

The idea came up a few years ago in Gaia’s mind when she got the opportunity to closely see the beauty of underwater nature in the Polynesian Ocean.

It took a while for her to externalize her desire to create a new fashion concept from the beauty she saw. She later told Gloria of the idea in August 2019 when many forests in the world started burning. (We all remember the scene of the singed koala rescued by a tourist in Australia).

That’s why we started thinking of a way to make our lives meaningful by doing something important to change things for the Planet — that’s why Zummy was created. Thus, Zummy takes its inspiration from the beautiful details of nature and turns it into art thanks to the wise know-how of a local illustrator.

“Made in Italy” is also an art recognized by the whole world. It is synonymous with "details" and "care" — each garment is actually an artwork.



2. It is striking that Zummy focuses on quality and impact rather than being profit-centred.

What ethical values or principles does Zummy follow to stay rooted in this choice?

What leads us every day in our work is a true commitment to what is correct and good. It doesn't matter how hard we must work, but you have to do what is right, the best way you can.

Sometimes it's hard because problems happen, as with all other companies. But then, when you listen to the news and hear about climate change and natural disasters, you promise yourself you'll work to make an impact and give your help to avoid all this.





3. A 2019 study by Statista reports that most Italians prefer buying their clothes from fast fashion stores.

What is your view on this preference and how does your brand aim to change this?

Well, the only reason why this happens is the price.

Fast fashion brands can produce low-price garments as the real price is probably paid by someone else on the other side of the planet.

Sustainable fashion is different, as it wants to be fair at every step of the production, towards people and the environment. For a brand, this means having higher industrial costs. That being said, of course, prices for sustainable garments are higher compared to fast fashion.

Though, what is actually happening in the fashion industry is that brands are trying to convert their production processes to be ethical and sustainable. Difficult or not, this is what brands will do in the next few years. That means that sustainable items will become more accessible for people since sustainable materials and processes will cost less and have lower product prices.

Therefore, going back to the beginning of this point, people will make more sustainable purchases. Most people are not bad. We want to believe that if they can, they will choose wisely.

4. The above-mentioned study also indicates that Italians find it difficult to discern eco-friendly brands. It is clear that Zummy's social media platforms aim to educate its audience.

In your opinion, what key role does Zummy's transparency and communication play in creating awareness of sustainable fashion?

It is fundamental. Transparency is a key factor in a brand's communication. That means, of course, that there must be a deep investigation to get answers.

It's really an important commitment and also hard — not all of the suppliers are available to open their door and give you all the information you, as a brand, ask them. That's why it all has to start with research, not with communication to the public.

I know this sounds obvious, but really how many times do we see the contrary, where a brand has nothing meaningful to say but keeps producing content that has no roots?



5. Zummy establishes itself as a brand of “Beauty, Colour and Sustainability” which is evident in the exquisite range of clothing and bags.

Which materials are your products made from and what role do they play in conserving our environment?

Zummy investigated a lot of materials during the long research we conducted. We saw and we still see that many brands use innovative materials, but in many cases, suppliers don't know anything about working conditions, chemical processes etc. That's why we decided to use only GOTS-certified cotton (grown without pesticides) and GRS-certified post-consumer polyester. These two certifications establish strict criteria on social and environmental perspectives.

We only use post-consumer polyester from a circular economy perspective. This way, we have the guarantee that suppliers don't calculate the exceeding quantities to sell compared to “recycled” pre-consumer. Our polyester comes from the consumer world and is brought back to the production in a circle.

Last but not least, we use TENCEL™ Lyocell, which is yarn produced by Lenzing AG and is eucalyptus fiber derived from responsibly managed forests. To produce it, Lenzing uses less water, less energy and recovers 99% of solvents.



6. With that, what other sustainable practices does Zummy follow during its production and distribution processes?

Zummy provides all of its suppliers with a survey in which they are asked questions regarding processes that are carried out externally and within the company, the number of subcontractors and their location, best practices in terms of well-being, inclusion and training; but also in terms of sustainable processes, for example in regards to any use of chemicals.

We also ask them whether some processes (carried out before or after spinning) are carried out in Uzbekistan or in the Xinjiang region. We require the origin of the textile fiber and the country of the spinning step.



Zummy is also establishing its own policies in an official document, that will be shared with its suppliers within the next few months.

As for the production, we prefer third party-certified materials and small local businesses for the processing. We avoid glue and adhesives to help recycle the garment at the end of its life. For the same reason, when designing a garment we pay attention to the coherent combination of materials, as much as possible. That's why on a product made of polyester, all should be in polyester too — from the inside and outside fabric, to the padding, to the tape.

All our buttons and accessories are produced by two companies that adhere to Detox Greenpeace's Campaign for eliminating from the production processes chemical substances harmful to human health and the environment.

Further, the prints on our cotton and Tencel Lyocell garments are made with GOTS and OEKOTEX certified inks, and with a GRS-certified printing process on polyesters.



7. Your website indicates that Zummy works with targeted suppliers and certified fabrics, such as TENCEL. Does Zummy have an ethical sourcing policy and, if so, what fundamental aspects does it entail?

As mentioned above, we try to investigate as much as we can both the social and the environmental issues.

That's why we do prefer certified materials and materials that can be guaranteed by the supplier as fair and sustainable on a double level, as mentioned.





8. Since Zummy is now exploring Fair Trade practices, which major practical steps have you taken to achieve this formidable goal?

Zummy is a "Made in Italy" brand and our products are produced in small local workshops. The only garment that is not made in Italy and that represents our personal exploration towards Fairtrade is the summery woman t-shirt.

It is sewn in India in an avant-garde company and it is guaranteed by Fairtrade and certified by GOTS too. The business that produces these T-shirts is in India and, in line with Fairtrade principles and values, promotes the wellbeing of its workforce by guaranteeing decent working conditions and wages. Working hours are regular (8 hours and a maximum of 1 hour overtime). Overtime is paid at twice the normal rate and contract conditions include 16 days paid holiday a year and 13 weeks paid maternity leave.

The company is also very sensitive about the environmental impact of its activity. It sources most of its energy from its own wind park and recycles its waste fabrics to make small accessories. It promotes environmental education by organizing training courses for employees.

9. To follow up on that, the Zummy T-Shirt is produced by a business in India, which may make it difficult to supervise their working conditions. How do you ensure fair treatment and pay for these workers?

As its supplier of short-sleeve shirts for women, Zummy chose a fair-trade co-operative that imports and distributes in Italy products made in the southern hemisphere and certified Fairtrade.

In the case of our t-shirt, it comes from India. Our direct supplier is listed on the official Fairtrade website as licensor for the use of the Fairtrade mark on this kind of garment in order to make sure, once more, that all of the t-shirts we buy from them have the Fairtrade label on the neck.



10. In addition to the above question, what challenges has limited supervision of workers posed in creating an all-around ethical and sustainable brand?

As we are truly committed to sustainability, we are creating policies and we use the survey already mentioned to make sure we know how our suppliers work and act. And doing this means asking a lot of questions, twice, three times and infinite, as long as we get the answers. (And sometimes these are very hard to get!)

Using materials that have certifications like the GRS and GOTS helps us to choose wisely. When these certifications don't apply, we ask our supplier to provide its own ethics code and to give a written guarantee to us on its commitment in supervising the respect of all its principles in the whole supply chain.

Some of our suppliers are growing with us. They can already provide a good level of sustainability, but they get more certifications since they started working with us. This is really important to us. We have to work hard, every day, but whoever says they did it all perfectly is for sure lying. What we have already achieved is a lot in the sustainability and ethics field, but we are ready to keep on improving every day together with our suppliers wherever it's possible. We only have one planet. Altogether, let's try to make it right as much as we can!



11. Zummy clearly appears to be an overall mindful company. How do you manage to maintain the flawless balance between being a sustainable brand and a business that aims to make profit?

That is the point and it is so hard. As mentioned, sustainable processes, fabrics and materials have a higher cost for a brand. That means higher prices for the customer. But when it comes to the customer, when he/she has to choose one garment or the other one, probably price will always be the most important factor for the most of the people. Therefore, the true challenge is to find a balance. The thing we really don't want to limit is the sustainability and the research around our products. This means working with the suppliers to find the best processes and price for planning and quantities wisely to ensure a lower range price.

It also involves perfectly calculating the needs of fabrics and materials for the next seasons, knowing that creativity will always have to fluctuate in our minds to find a better way to use exceeding quantities on a zero-waste perspective. (That's how our foulard came to life).



Thank you for your cooperation on behalf of The Thinking Watermill Society. All the best in your current and future endeavours at Zummy, Ms Gaia Novello and Ms Gloria De Lazzari.

# Learn More about Gaia Novello & Gloria De Lazzari

**VISIT ZUMMY**







# About The Thinking Watermill Society

The Thinking Watermill Society is a non-profit organization. In particular, it promotes the debate and exchange of ideas among its members regarding the changes underway in the economic, cultural and social landscape, together with the analysis of the consequences that said changes entail, so as to identify the possible opportunities of economic, cultural and social growth related to said changes.

Our headquarters are in Rome, Italy.



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