

The Thinking Watermill Society | May 2022

# Interview with Mrs Valeria Mangani

(President of Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society)



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# Introduction

Valeria Mangani is the President of The Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society (SFIS), which enhances and promotes sustainable and ethical fashion brands in Italy.

In this interview, The Thinking Watermill Society presents its audience to the SFIS operations and their creative approach towards the future of sustainability .



1. The Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society (SFIS) is described as a place “Where Fashion Meets Science.” What is the main objective of the Society and how does science fit into it?

Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society arises from the need to:

- enhance fashion and Made in Italy;
- promote the sustainability of the production process;
- facilitate the innovation of the connected supply chain;
- increase the circular economy;
- increase respect for the planet;
- promote the protection of the seas; and
- increase consumer awareness.

The Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society is an active player in the dissemination of the culture of sustainability in every field, whether ethical, civil, industrial, energy, agriculture or food. We support fashion by helping to design Small and Mid-Size Enterprises (SMEs) in their delicate transition to an eco-sustainable path. We help them consider factors such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, blockchain, industrial digitization, CRISPR and luxury up-cycling, which are just some of the inevitable factors in the immediate future. In this respect, we have the **Phyigital Sustainability EXPO** which has a dedicated area for the inclusion of disadvantaged people such as the blind, deaf and mute minorities using wearable technologies and smart shirts. These will help them interact with other innovations that aid them, like danger-detector shirts, directional shirts and sensorial embraced shirts.

Lastly, SFIS supports and promotes Fashion-Tech startups, as well as NGOs that pursue social projects of women empowerment through fashion, such as Made in Carcere - the winner of the contest with our partner Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane.

2. The SFIS team is comprised of important experts from different fields. What are your thoughts on cross-disciplinary cooperation for the future of international sustainable development?

In terms of cross-disciplinary cooperation, it is crucial to merge tech innovations with traditional fashion in order to obtain sustainable innovation.

As an example, during our Phygital Sustainability EXPO, gamified augmented reality screens will educate and inform visitors (schools and consumers) on the product life cycle of a t-shirt from a technical point of view - from the cotton field all the way to the dump. Hence, the EXPO helps in comparing, not only the carbon footprint level of “regular” (pollutant) garments to sustainable garments, but also the life cycle of the same garment using the circular economy model.

3. The term “sustainability” is often used in different contexts and has various interpretations. What is your definition of sustainability?

Literally speaking, sustainability is *“designating of, or characterized by a practice that sustains a given condition, as economic growth or a human population, without destroying or depleting natural resources, polluting the environment, etc.”*

Personally speaking, sustainability is the essence of our personal experience of life, our character and the attitude we have towards daily gestures of respect for others - humans, animals and the planet. Nowadays, sustainability is a luxury, the greatest of all, and the most virtuous essence of it is inclusion.



#### 4. As a non-profit association focusing on sustainable fashion, how has the SFIS made efforts to contribute to the mission of the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Change?

Since all revolutions start from below, our mission is to inform consumers about sustainable and mindful fashion, increasing transparency and traceability, as well, to encourage the eco-transition of the packaging sector (of which the fashion industry is the main consumer), by introducing recycled plastic or biodegradable materials.

SFIS final mission is to decrease emissions and carbon footprint levels of fashion companies, optimize resources, reduce waste, and use vegan alternatives to animal skins, thereby encouraging the use of processing waste from fruit peels, cereals, cactus, mushrooms and fungi.

We contribute to the Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Change by offering completely free high edge sustainable education to all our 2,000 subscribed brands. We are the only Italian Association offering a “Roadmap” of free activities to all our brands each month with our key international partners such as Ernst & Young, Enel X and many more

## 5. How does the SFIS uphold its reputation as being the largest sustainable fashion community?

Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society is the largest European community for sustainable brands, with more than 2,000 subscribed firms inside our hub. In addition to offering our affiliates a series of exclusive free monthly services, Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society organizes the Phygital Sustainability Expo yearly. It is the first event in Italy exclusively dedicated to the sustainability of fashion and design innovation.

The Phygital Sustainability Expo is also the first phygital platform that acts as a marketplace (not e-commerce), where demand and supply between sustainable brands and exclusively sustainable international buyers, as well as manufacturing and stakeholders, creative clusters and technologists, meet to create sustainable development for the country. This happens by offering the Italian fashion industry the possibility to undertake the ecological transition, which contributes to decreasing carbon footprint levels to meet the SDG 2030 parameters.

We are inclusive and we believe in the Phygital Democracy ® which is about letting our community of sustainable brands vote about all decisions regarding the Phygital Sustainability Expo, with the aim to make their event perfect. We try to include all brands in Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society and help those less sustainable to become sustainable thanks to our monthly free services.

Thanks to Phygital Sustainability Expo, once a year, we reward a few very sustainable brands within our community by letting them participate in the Phygital Sustainability Expo (An estimate of 35-50 brands over our 2,000 brands community).

6. Since the SFIS represents 47 nations, how does the SFIS ensure the featured brands or companies remain sustainable and ethical?

In order to participate to our Phygital Sustainability EXPO events, we apply two strict criteria to all brands who make an application.

In the first place, we give value to all those brands that possess Italian or internationally-recognized certifications (GOTS, B Corp, etc). Furthermore, we also have an extremely prestigious Honour Committee that attentively evaluates all applying brands and decides according to several strict criteria of sustainability, such as raw materials usage and carbon footprint emissions.

In addition, we do not sell certifications. Yet, we are the only entity in Italy that has the biggest database of sustainable suppliers. We have mapped more than 2,500 sustainable brands in our database as of February 2022. By telling our 2,000+ subscribed brands where to produce their next sustainable collections, we ensure our community has all the necessary tools to reach full innovation and keep up with the international circularity and sustainability rules.



7. The Phygital Sustainability Expo is exceptionally unique and plays a part in the future of the fashion industry. What inspired its creation?

The World Economic Forum has shown that the fashion industry is the second most polluting sector in the world after the oil industry. Each year, it is responsible for 10% of global greenhouse gas emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>) and contributes to the dissipation of 20% of the total water resources used in the various production phases (i.e. dyeing, printing, finishing and maintaining the cotton plantations).

The fashion sector supports a turnover of 225 billion euros, which occupies with stable work more than 300 million people globally and that contributes significantly to world wealth. According to a UN report, it is estimated that the fashion sector consumes more energy than air transport and maritime transport combined. In addition, 85% of fabrics are burned every year, further polluting the planet with PM<sub>10</sub>, PM<sub>5</sub>, PM<sub>1</sub>.

Textiles and clothing have a huge impact on ocean pollution: about 60% of the clothes are made of polyester which, with washing, annually releases about 500 thousand tons of microfibers into waterways (the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles!). The sustainability of fashion can no longer be postponed and is also an increasingly pressing matter.

Furthermore, the massive awareness on the part of the consumer and the fashion industry, makes it an industry whose value is estimated to rise to 8 billion euros by 2025, and increase to 12.5 billion by 2030, with an annual growth rate of 9%.

Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society is born from the urge to help the international fashion community to reach its full sustainability potential and to help Italian SMEs with their sustainable disruption.

8. 2019 statistics indicate a major shift toward sustainable consumerism in Italy. What efforts does the SFIS make towards helping businesses transition to more sustainable operations?

The mission of the Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society is to accompany fashion companies in the path of ecological transition, to achieve full sustainability. Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society can facilitate the ecological transition path of the entire supply chain towards green (SDG 12 and 13), introducing one or more elements for the sustainable innovation of the fashion segment.

In light of the European legislation on circularity in force since 2022, thousands of micro SMEs and large Italian companies are going through one big problem: not knowing how to innovate their business processes and which suppliers to source from in order to make their processes and materials more sustainable, more circular and with less CO2 emissions (the carbon footprint).

Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society is the leader in Italy for the ecological transition of fashion and design brands, thanks to our thirty years of experience in the sustainability of fashion and luxury and thanks to our mapping made up of thousands of sustainable suppliers throughout the national territory, divided into every conceivable sustainable product category.

Making practical examples, we help companies disrupt in terms of sustainability tactics in the following ways:

- With change management. Best practices and innovative tactics to make the brand consume less raw materials.
- Techniques on how production emissions (reducing Carbon Footprint emissions-CO2).
- Suggestions on how to produce using raw materials (fibers, materials) that are more sustainable and that have less environmental impact.



9. You played a crucial role in proposing Bills for the promotion of fashion Law in the Lazio Region. What are your thoughts on the recently approved Bill No. 202 of 2019 “Provisions to Promote the Fashion Sector”?

This law is an achievement of which I am very proud, because I am Consultant of the Productive Activities Commission in Lazio region. Lazio region was the first government body to enact a law for the specific promotion of fashion. Not even the Lombardy Region had it before Lazio.

10. What initiatives and events should we look forward to from the SFIS?

The Phygital Sustainability Expo® is the new sustainable fashion and design event of the Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society. Now in its third edition and it will be held on 2nd and 3rd July 2022 at the spectacular archaeological complex of the Imperial Forums in Rome. It is the first event in Italy entirely dedicated to the ecological transition of the fashion and design system through technological innovation.

Phygital Sustainability Expo chooses an exceptional location: a grandiose monumental complex, one of the major architectural masterpieces of ancient Rome.

Thank you for your cooperation on behalf of The Thinking Watermill Society. All the best in your current and future endeavours, Mrs Mangani.

# Learn More about the Sustainable Fashion Innovation Society

**VISIT SUSTAINABLE FASHION INNOVATION SOCIETY**





# 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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"Ideas are what make us human. Ideas do not get handed to us by elites, the rich or the powerful. Ideas are not bounded by colour, race, gender or religion."