

LUXURY & SUSTAINABILITY

By Myrto Papailiou

In this article it will be analyzed the relationship between the fashion luxury and the sustainability, as well as my belief that **we are moving towards a more sustainable luxury**. The term *luxury* goes hand by hand with the meaning of high quality. However, the quality is something liquid, which changes along with time. For example, quality in older times was the fur, the diamonds, the expensiveness, the status. Nowadays, quality has a deeper meaning, which is characterized by ideology, originality and durability. Luxury, as we know it, embraces three main values: timelessness, uniqueness and emotional value. These values share a common ground with sustainability's values and this is the reason why those two terms, luxury and sustainability, would eventually come to a deal.

Economic crisis was a very important historical and societal driver for people's behavior. It scared people and brought them closer to their origins, while at the same time increased their need for trust, stability and durability. People learned with the hard way that nothing is for granted and as a result had to appreciate what they already had. This is also one of the reasons of why the people have turned again to "mother earth" and began to worry about its survival. Economic crisis has given birth to a generation of concerned and strict consumers with very high standards. The status of a company is not enough anymore, because there must be a proof for every single statement it does. On the other hand, the exit from the economic crisis has led people into a need for "pampering" and attention. There is certainly a need to celebrate the exit from the crisis by spoiling ourselves, while in parallel we are sensible consumers, who seek for true quality and not fake luxury. Culturally, people have expressed an interest in contemporary and modern art. They seek for an art which carries messages and not expressions of shallow beauty. For the exact same reason there is also a focus on the graphic arts and revolutionary prints. From a theoretical point of view, we have all these sustainable theories popping up, such as Re-shoring, Recycle, CSR, Cradle to Cradle, "Bye Less Pay More", which educate the consumer and the industry slowly invading into their lives.

Consequently, a new face of luxury has revealed. We notice that the high quality this period is driven by:

- Handmade and craftsmanship techniques. People seek for originality and there is nothing more original than the handmade product, such as handmade knitwear.
- Impressive and golden prints on fine fabrics such as satin. The new luxury comes with statements and ideologies. Sophisticated prints have filled the market with a lot of artful messages.
- High quality fabrics from Europe.
- Balance between formal and informal fabrics. There is this need for the consumers to feel that the balance has been restored. The old luxurious trend of "leather, on top fur, on top gold, on top diamond" has been demystified. The new consumers prefer old school luxury in smaller amounts. Leather goes hand by hand with cotton and fur comes in small portions along with wool. Moreover, what street style taught us is a mix and match of fur with caps, trainers with diamond rings and brotherhood jackets with leather sleeves. This is much more humble and sustainable attitude of using the luxurious materials.
- Fair productions in Europe and better quality of construction. Europe has become a popular industrial world for designers and luxury brands. "Made in China" sounds as

cheap as gums and “Made in Bangladesh” awakes memories of horror pictures, which drive the consumers away.

- Sustainable certifications. Fairtrade Certified Cotton, Global Organic Textile Standard, Ethical Award, NICE and lots of other organizations are working together with the designers and the brands to build a better future. By collaborating with these organizations, the brand’s quality is certified and the customer has proof of what he/she actually buys.
- Use of organic textiles. The word “organic” is the next main word of luxury’s vocabulary, as it represents health and health was always a privilege of the high society.
- Emotional and physical durability. The consumer wants to know that his product will last, because now he/she understands the meaning of “Buy less, better quality and pay more”. Additionally, it is important that the product share common values and statements with the consumer.
- Storytelling, statement, meaning of existence. Important part of a company’s identity is the storytelling. We don’t buy products anymore, but we do buy concepts. We are not simply consumers or even loyal consumers, but followers of a brand. For example, the luxurious brand Elvis & Kresse make a stylish range of high-end bags, wallets, belts and cases from decommissioned fire-brigade hoses that would normally end up in landfill and fifty per cent of profits from the fire-hose line are donated to the Fire Fighters Charity.

Each of the above characteristics has a sustainable angle and most of them have been discussed in articles, blogs and fashion news.

Because of all the aforementioned facts, I firmly believe that we are moving towards a more sustainable luxury, where the meaning of quality has moved deeper into values and ethics. What we expect to see from now on is a more European and fair production, more handmade products, more storytelling around the craftsmanship and the cause of each product, more mix and match, more durable and healthy products, more statements than style and above all more sustainable solutions...