

## Lucia Mauri and Lorenzo Malavolta. *Intrecci Etici, La rivoluzione della moda sostenibile in Italia.*

LUMA video, 2021

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Following the catastrophic Rana Plaza collapse in late April 2013, we saw an increasing number of documentaries expounding the not so bright side of the fashion industry. From the exposure of the social issues that intervene with the global clothes production (*The True Cost*, 2015; *Made in Bangladesh*, 2019; *Luxury: Behind the Mirror*, 2019), to the documentaries talking about the fashion industry's hazardous strike on the environment (*River Blue*, 2016), as well as the greenwashing, transparency, and consumer-related problems (*The Clothes We Wear*, 2020), most of the fashion documentaries were focused on the negative impact of the industry "which affects 100 per cent of the (global) population."<sup>1</sup>

In January 2021, a diverse type of fashion documentary premiered on the Infinity+ digital platform. *Intrecci Etici*, directed by Lucia Mauri and Lorenzo Malavolta, produced by LUMA video in collaboration with *produzionidelbasso*, recounts the story, or better, the reality of the ongoing sustainable and ethical fashion revolution in Italy. The documentary opens with the nostalgic reflection of the national coordinator of Fashion Revolution, Marina Spadafora, on how half-century ago, our relation to clothes was significantly different from what we experience today; she notes how back in the 50s and 60s, it was all more responsible and inherently sustainable. After Spadafora, we gradually get to know the protagonists of the documentary, all experienced practitioners in the field, sharing their point of view on the contemporary fashion system. Starting from consumer's unawareness of the industry's impact (Francesca Lionti, *Diorama Boutique*) to the convenience in term of the price (Niccolò Cipriani, *Rifò*), but also the instant emotional fulfilment that the act of shopping comports (Flavio Berto, *Berto Industria Tessile*, Cinzia Congia, *Maeko Tessuti & Filati Naturali*), we start to collect the reasons behind the fast fashion consumption. Francesca Romana Rinaldi, PhD. and an expert on responsible fashion, points out that it is also the system that creates this habit of continuous consumption in the consumers, incentivized by the low-cost products, but also by the ever-changing offer and the pressure to always follow the trends

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1. Orsola De Castro, *Loved Clothes Last* (Penguin Random House UK, 2021)

(Francesca Boni, *Il vestito verde*). The initial overview ends with the question of how much we actually know about the clothes we wear, introducing us to the concept of transparency (Rinaldi). Spadafora explains how for the food and cosmetics industry it is a norm to be completely transparent and points out that those types of legislations should be indispensable also for the fashion industry. ‘The companies must dedicate time and effectively explain how they produce’ (Congia), but it is also true that ‘the consumer must insist on getting information’ (Berto) — an action which is facilitated and possible in contemporary information society (Cipriani).

The documentary unfolds depicting the everyday operations of few Italian fashion realities, each with its specific approach to sustainability. Marco Scolastici from *Azienda Agricola Scolastici* introduces us to the production of high-quality wool obtained from the autochthonic *Sopravvissana* sheep which through the past decades became endangered due to the preferred breeding of other more productive sheep species. From the Marche region, we move to Sardinia and we get a close view of the practice of Carolina Angius — the creative spirit and seamstress behind *Carolina Emme* — whose hand-made pieces epitomise the slow fashion principles and are made of limited waste stock materials. At *Maeko Tessuti & Filati Naturali*, the focus is on the natural fibers, which, as Cinzia Congia and Mauro Vismara explain, through mechanical processes are transformed into precious textiles, which differ from the synthetic materials, are completely safe for the environment and ‘could be regenerated to last for generations, as it was done by our grand grandparents’ (Cinzia Congia). In Tuscany, Carlo Pierucci tells the story of *Mario Doni* — a company that follows the artisanal tradition of *Bottega Rinascimentale*: they produce on-demand only footwear and use exclusively local, naturally tanned leather, eliminating in that manner the hazardous chemicals from the leather treatment processes. Already in the stories of these four fashion practitioners, we can individualise the traditional values which then mirror themselves in the particular care for the world: protection and valorisation of the endangered species, waste minimisation and care for the environment to name the most evident.

The production models have drastically changed in the last thirty years. From the more traditional ready-to-order, there was a passage towards the ready-to-stock model, characteristic of fast fashion (Rinaldi, Cipriani, Spadafora). The majority of fashion production today follows the linear model, which means that the material goods are designed, produced, consumed and then disposed of, ending up at a landfill or in an incinerator. As Rinaldi explains, the only possible solution lays in the transition towards circular models.

The cradle-to-cradle approach aims at creating a ‘closed circle’ which ... considers the waste product as a nourishing factor to be reincorporated in a ‘continuous closed cycle’ without any energy or physical materials being wasted.<sup>2</sup>

In that line, the documentary proceeds showing us the very successful story of *Rifò* — a brand dedicated to regenerative processes and the circular economy. All of the production phases are completed within the Prato district, making it a perfect example of the ongoing tendency of the traditional Italian production district revival — the most prominent feature of the contemporary Italian localism. Exemplary of the district production is also the practice of *Berto Industria Tessile*, a company with a rich heritage, dedicated to low-impact jeans production. Their optimized processes comport significant reduction in water consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and they follow the 5R principles: respect, recycle, reuse, repair, reduce.

For a sustainability approach to be holistic, the social and ethical aspects must be incorporated. A brand is truly moving towards a sustainable future only if it is responsible and dedicated to resolve of the persistent inequalities and social distinctions. A positive example comes from Veneto, where the social company *Quid* operates. They have around 150 employees, 90% of which are women, while 70% come from particularly difficult backgrounds. The company offers a possibility for people from marginalised categories to reintegrate into society and provides means for a decent life.

The positive examples are always fraught with raising awareness on some of the most problematic points of today’s fashion industry. The fashion companies already acknowledge the changing sensibilities and

2. Francesca Romana Rinaldi, *Fashion Industry 2030* (Bocconi University Press, EGEA S.p.A. Milan, 2019), p.93.

know that the consumer today is becoming always more responsible. We are still far away from systematic change, but the companies are doing everything to convince the consumer that they are responsible too. This is where the greenwashing comes into scene. Particularly important, is the part of the documentary where this problem is addressed and advice are given on how to differ the true commitment from the one-time green advertisement.

The final of the documentary is dedicated to future commitment and comment on what we can all do to improve the situation. Elisa Tagliavini from *Friperie* and Francesca Lioni from *Diorama*, share the love for the vintage and explain why is it one of the most sustainable options out there. It is somehow linked also to the concept of the “grandma’s jumper” — the one that evokes strong emotions and has a story to tell (Cipriani). ‘The true power is in the hands of the consumers’ (Congia, Pierucci, Berto), we should all ‘buy less and buy better’ (Rinaldi, Pierucci), ‘try to do our little steps towards sustainability’ (Lioni), ‘act now and within our possibilities, change for better’ (Angius). On the road towards profound change, ‘every step counts’, but ‘we cannot fool ourselves that we are sustainable even if we buy twenty pairs of sustainable shoes’ (Pierucci). In the end, ‘the impact will be profoundly significant only if we unite in associations and we became really vocal about the needed changes.’ (Spadafora)

Insightful for those with previous knowledge on the topic, the documentary is even more important for the general public because it offers an optimistic viewpoint. The message is that we all can and should change; it is not something that will come without effort, but there are plenty of possibilities to be embraced. It is of relevance also from a fashion studies point of view because it depicts the ongoing changes in the Italian landscape. It is interesting how it confirms the discussed possibility of the new emblematic figure — the artisan, which in the early 2010s was individualised as the key figure of the contemporary Made in Italy.<sup>3</sup> For the moment, the documentary is available only in Italian, but the production is working on eventual translation. The team works also on a podcast thought as conversations with other field professionals. Every episode is dedicated to a different aspect of fashion sustainability and represents an insightful resource for all those interested to learn more on the topic. The podcast is available on their YouTube channel.

## Bibliography

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3. Bernard Cova, “Conclusion. Il Made in Italy: dopo I capitani d’industria e I creative, gli artigiani?”, in *Il Made in Italy* eds. Ampelio Bucci, Vanni Codeluppi and Mauro Ferraresi, (Carocci Editore, Roma, 2011)

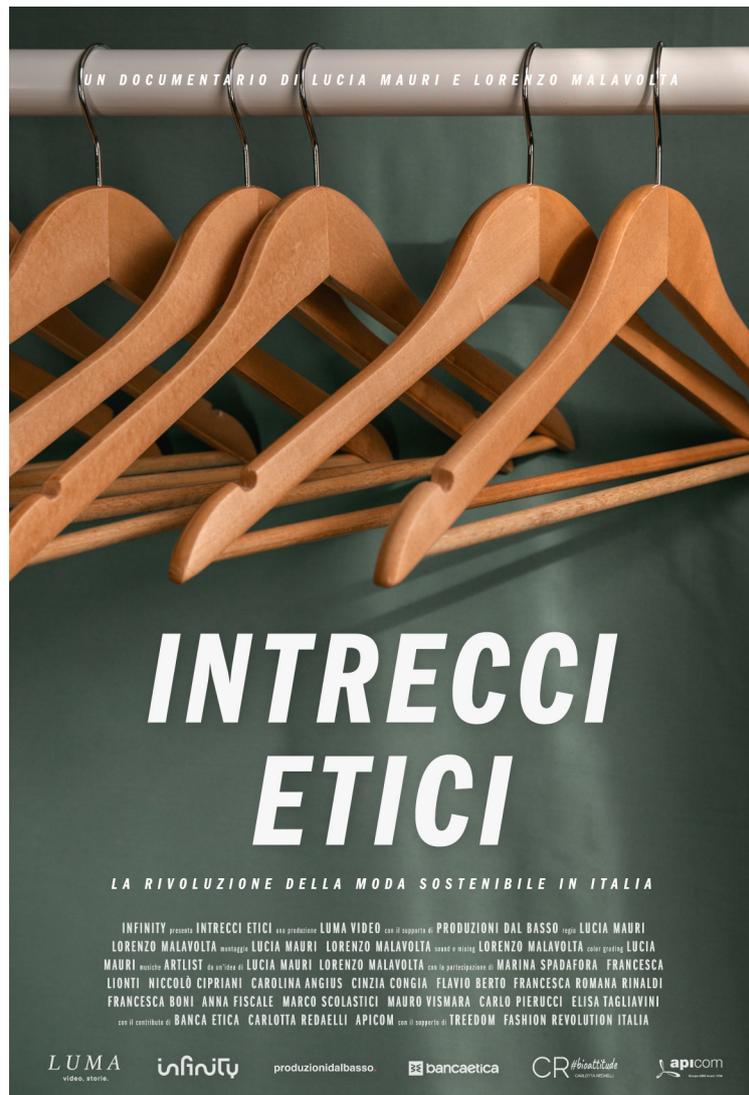


Figure 1: *Intrecci Etici. La rivoluzione della moda sostenibile in Italia*. Documentary poster. Courtesy of Intrecci Etici team. ©LUMA video



Figure 2: *Intrecci Etici. La rivoluzione della moda sostenibile in Italia.* Backstage photo at *Diorama Boutique*. Courtesy of Intrecci Etici team. ©LUMA video



Figure 3: *Intrecci Etici. La rivoluzione della moda sostenibile in Italia.* Backstage photo at *Quid* production facilities. Courtesy of Intrecci Etici team. ©LUMA video