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Future of Sustainable Fashion II

WORKSHOP REPORT, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE « EYE OF EUROPE » PROJECT

JUNE 2025



HELENOS
CONSULTING



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Preface

The Future of Sustainable Fashion pilot took place on Monday, April 14, 2025, at the MOMus - Museum of Modern Art in Thessaloniki, Greece. The workshop was implemented surrounded by the exhibition **Collective Threads: Anna Andreeva at the Red Rose Silk Factory**. This initiative was implemented by Helenos Consulting, a partner of the Eye of Europe Project, and aimed to engage international and local foresight, textile and fashion experts.



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Eye of Europe

The workshop is carried out within the framework of the Eye of Europe research project, which is funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe programme under Grant Agreement No. 101131738 and coordinated by UEFISCDI, Romania's research and innovation funding agency. Eye of Europe focuses on strengthening the use of foresight methods within Research and Innovation (R&I) policymaking throughout Europe. Its long-term vision is to build a more connected and impactful R&I foresight community that works as a shared intelligence to inform, shape, and guide policy decisions.

Helenos Consulting

The workshop «The Future of Sustainable Fashion II» was organized and implemented on 14th of April 2025, by Helenos Consulting. Helenos Consulting is a boutique firm, based in Thessaloniki. Inspired from the Greek mythological figure Helenos- known for foreseeing future events- the company emphasizes in scientific methodology, ethical integrity, and collaboration to deliver actionable, data-driven insights. Its services span two main pillars: regional innovation strategy including RIS3 strategy development, project management, and quality systems — and strategic perspectives (foresight), such as scenario analysis, trend scanning, and education for future strategists. Having worked in numerous transnational projects on different subjects such as Tourism, Environment, innovation, creative industries and health, the Helenos team brings deep experience in strategy, entrepreneurship, capacity building of ecosystems, and foresight. By shaping regional innovation strategies, supporting co-financed projects, and coaching organizations to enhance strategic capacities, the company demonstrates a commitment to fostering growth, cultural development, and long-term impact.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Context

Today, our highly complex and uncertain world requires strategic tools that will help us create new sustainable development trajectories. Fashion is more than an industry. It can reveal unique and collective identities, norms, and ethics but is also associated with environmental issues. It is one of the largest pollutant industries, prompting a shift in how we produce and consume fashion items. How might the climate crisis change our attitudes, and how does this impact the fashion industry?

Historically, fashion trends have been reflecting social issues. Characteristic examples are the 50's full skirts in America, which put the woman in a specific position within the family and society, and the feminine wig hair in Ancient Egypt as a symbol of wisdom and respect revealing the matriarchal regime that was dominating in that period, and many other incidents. Nowadays, the role of the sexes has changed, while fashion consumption can also demonstrate our ethics and norms about social issues such as working conditions and climate change.

1.2 Objectives

The main goal of the workshop on the Future of Sustainable Fashion is to explore the connections among objects, fiction, culture, and systems and to inspire participants to rethink their consumption habits, express themselves, imagine, and co-create alternative futures. The game-based methodology of Fashion Futuring, proposes a significant shift in fashion's approach to the future, moving away from short-term trends and predictions based on economic growth and industrial productivity, and instead embracing a more long-term, values-driven, empathetic, collective, humane, and environmentally conscious approach. In this workshop fashion is employed as a tool to explore deeper social issues touching upon individual and collective identities, social norms and shared anxieties for the future. These concerns are expressed through imaginative scenarios and fictional artefacts- which can ultimately be translated into strategic priorities for R&I policies in Europe.

This workshop is implemented with the participation of 25 experts (including three people from the organization team). It has been the second workshop for the Future of Sustainable Fashion. The first one was realized with local citizens in January of 2025 in Thessaloniki.



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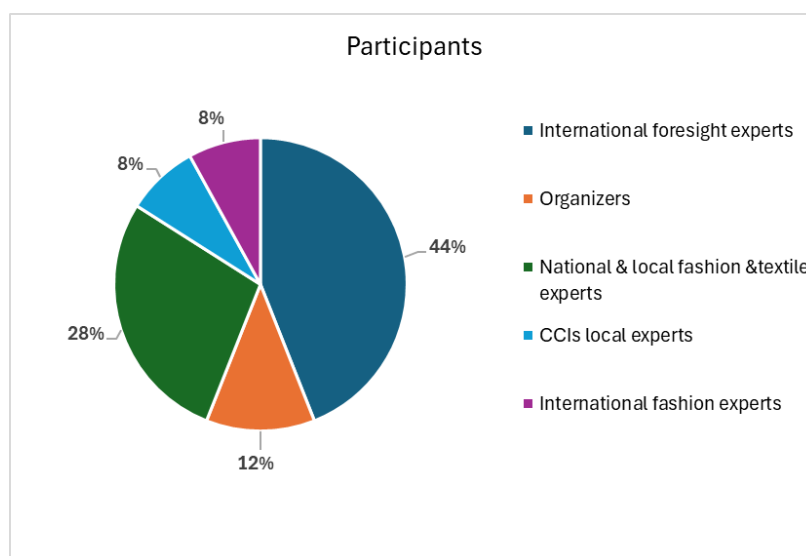


Figure 1 : Participation Composition, own editing



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2 Process and methods

2.1 Process and Methods

The pilot workshop was based on the game-based methodology of **Fashion Futuring**, a tool developed by Garcia (2023). It is a 7-stage method that includes various foresight methods: speculative design (core), design thinking, what-if scenario development, and an alteration of the future wheel towards strategic, systemic thinking. Fashion Futuring calls upon design concepts combined with the pre-mentioned foresight methods to determine which values can lead us to transform old systems and create more habitable and environmentally friendly futures. More analytically, it contains the following stages:

1. At the beginning of the workshop and for groups to get to know each other better, participants are asked to draw and **describe their favorite fashion item explaining its value for them.**
2. Then, they complete a **fashion timeline**, recognizing and discussing advantages and disadvantages in fashion in the past and present and possible opportunities and threats for the future of fashion.
3. In the third stage, **what-if scenarios** were produced. Based on given images, groups create alternative futures, describing the main emotions that dominate in each scenario
4. Following the **speculative design method**, the participants of each group co-created a fictional fashion item that will correspond to the needs of the above-mentioned alternative future.
5. In the fifth phase, each group **declare the main values** and what Fashion represents in their Future.
6. Afterwards, each group filled out **an alteration of the future wheel**, called the Fashion Futuring wheel, where they create strategic, systemic roadmaps of change, taking into account different aspects of life:
 - i) Environment, Social Responsibility and Governance
 - ii) Manufacturing and Distribution
 - iii) Materials, Science and Technology
 - iv) Design Principles
 - v) Communication
 - vi) Consumption and Trends
 - vii) Education & Politics



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viii) Arts & Philosophy

Participants work backwards from future to present, putting possible events or/and actions needed in each of the prementioned aspects.

7. At the end of the workshop, each participant evaluates the produced scenario based on the timeline (near or distant future) and its degree of realism (realistic or unrealistic).

Table 1 : Steps of Methodology Fashion Futuring, Source : Garcia (2023), own editing

Activity	Purpose	Setting
Setting the scene Introductory Presentation	Sharing information on background and approach of the workshop	Plenary
Fashion ID	Revealing personal thoughts and perceptions of each participant	Individual
Fashion Evolution	Exploring the changes of the socio-economic context throughout the years reflected in fashion trends	Groups
Impossible Worlds	Scenario building (what-if scenarios based on given images)	Groups
Wearing Fiction	Drawing a common fictional fashion artefact of the future	Groups
Fashion Futures	Exploring & Expressing what fashion might	Individual/Groups



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	represent in society and culture in this future.	
Fashion Futuring Wheels	Creation of strategic roadmap for systemic change	Groups



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3 Results and outcomes

3.1 Favorite Fashion Items

The participants' descriptions and explanations of their favorite fashion items revealed broader categories of preference and evaluation of these items. The first category -**practicality**, highlights aspects of good fit, elegance, functionality, versatility, and durability as key attributes appreciated in fashion items. The second category mirrors **ethical considerations in consumption**, including the usage of natural and sustainable materials, as well as second-hand clothing, underscoring participants' awareness of and contribution to the circular economy and sustainable fashion practices. The third category captures the **emotional value** of fashion items. Participants associated their favorite pieces with positive emotions such as love, affection, freedom, and a sense of safety. Many also connected these items to **meaningful personal memories**, such as connections with loved ones or local traditions, which reveals the deep sentimental significance embedded in clothing choices. Additionally, they mentioned distinctive characteristics such as **vintage appeal** and **originality**, emphasizing the **uniqueness** and **individuality** of their favorite fashion items.

3.2 Fashion Timeline Analysis

Participants were asked to rethink and Insights gathered during the workshop revealed a layered understanding of fashion across time, highlighting evolving values, technological advancements, and social implications. Participants identified both positive and negative dimensions across three horizons—**past, present, and future**

3.2.1 Past

Participants reflected positively on several aspects of past fashion practices. These included the **durability and quality of clothing**, the common usage of **natural raw materials**, and the prevalence of **handmade and custom-made garments**. Slow fashion also led to a close relationship between designers and consumers, depicting the social aspect that fashion market used to have in the past, but also the value placed on transgenerational clothing and self-**sufficiency in consumption**, meaning that people owned less clothes than today. Consequently, people were perceived to have a stronger

emotional attachment to their garments and to prioritize **quality over quantity**. Despite these strengths, the past was also marked by several limitations. Fashion was often **inaccessible due to high costs and limited availability**. Furthermore, there was a **lack of diversity** in clothing, and the industry contributed to the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. Additionally, **fashion was frequently used to assert social and political dominance, with links to colonialism and racial inequality**. **Clothing functioned as a symbol of social status, reinforcing exclusionary hierarchies.**

3.2.2 Present

Contemporary fashion is seen as more **diverse** than it was before, allowing people to express themselves through their garments. Besides communicating **personal and collective identities** clothing has become a powerful medium for **raising awareness of social issues**. In the post-COVID era, fashion has become less formal and more functional, reflecting a broader shift in the values we prioritize—such as comfort and practicality. Also, the popularity of **second-hand fashion and the circular economy** signals a shift toward more sustainable practices and consumption trends, while AI-assisted design and eco-friendly textiles point to promising relevant developments.

The prevalence of fast fashion presents specific benefits and drawbacks for the fashion industry and society. On the one hand, the increased affordability of clothing today enhances **accessibility** and promotes a **sense of equality** across social classes, supported by a wide range of global and digital retail platforms. However, it has led to **overconsumption**, declining **clothing quality**, the widespread use of **harmful materials**. Moreover, the mass production has a large carbon footprint, but also produces tons of waste, leading to the environmental degradation and exploitation of natural resources, phenomena that remain pressing concerns. Additionally, participants noted a lack of emotional attachment to clothing and the prioritization of brands over quality.

Issues such as **gender washing**¹, **greenwashing**², and **cultural appropriation**³ were also highlighted as ongoing challenges in fashion today.

¹ Gender-washing in fashion design refers to the superficial or performative use of gender inclusivity in branding or product development—especially when it's not backed by meaningful change or commitment to gender diversity.

² Greenwashing in the fashion industry refers to the practice where brands mislead consumers into believing that their products or practices are more environmentally friendly or sustainable than they actually are.

³ **Cultural appropriation in fashion** is when designers, brands, or individuals use elements of a culture—especially one that has been historically marginalized or oppressed—**without understanding, respecting, or crediting its origin**, often for aesthetic or commercial gain

3.2.3 Future

Participants expressed optimism about the future developments in fashion industry. They envisioned a future where the circular economic model dominated, supported by innovations such as **biotechnology, smart textiles, genderless garments, and short supply chains**⁴. Aligned with that, future generations are expected to adopt **more ethical consumption habits**, while fashion will continue to serve as a powerful medium for **expressing existing and new identities**.

Despite this hopeful outlook, several concerns about the future remain. If sustainable practices and the usage of smart textiles fail to become widespread and economically accessible, affordability of clothing could become a barrier, echoing social issues of the past. The **integration of AI and robotics** into the production process was seen as a possible solution for the cost efficiency, not as a replacement for human labor but as a means to enhance and support artisanal craftsmanship.

However, according to the experts, an overreliance in technology can also lead to the potential loss of human connection. In this context, the growing presence of **virtual and augmented reality fashion** raises questions about the future of traditional and personal clothing and identity. There is a risk that such trends could lead to a **homogenization of style**, causing fashion to lose some of its symbolic and cultural depth. On the other hand, a possible dominion of **fast fashion**—and the continued use of low-quality, harmful materials—will threaten the environmental sustainability.

3.3 What-if Scenarios, Fashion Artefacts, Values and Emotions

The five groups of the workshop, imagined different scenarios, based on which they created artificial fashion artefacts of the future. The main values recognized through this process are flexibility, adaptability, security, survival and connection.

A group envisioned a **divided society** where only a privileged few live in abundance, while the vast majority remain excluded—often narrowed to **virtual realms** as technological advancements blur the line between reality and simulation. The fashion artefact of this scenario was a **hybrid, gender-neutral swimsuit** which was designed to help individuals adapt to and protect themselves from shifting external conditions, through versatility in shape and regulation of temperature. However, this essential garment will be accessible only to the wealth elite. Scientifically advanced, it incorporates nanotechnology,

⁴ **Short supply chains** is a term that is increasingly used, especially in discussions around **sustainable production, local economies, and fashion systems**. It generally refers to supply chains that involve **fewer intermediaries, shorter geographic distances, and closer connections** between producers and consumers.



biotechnology, and smart textiles. In terms of social dynamics, this artifact embodies the paradoxes of its time: created with the intention of fostering collective resilience and equality, yet ultimately shaped by the same systems of exclusivity and hierarchy it seeks to counter.

In a hyper-digital future, **personal data is seen as something sacred**. People believe their identity is private and should be protected at all costs. The virtual reality people experience, comes at costs. More specifically, high degree of control, restrictions in expression of identity and speech, fake experiences government propaganda, and disconnection of nature are the main implications. Many feel trapped, longing for real connection and a return to the natural world. While protecting privacy is important, it also makes life feel restricted and lonely. In this world, safety requires isolation and unease. To protect identity and promote privacy in this world, people **wear a full-body raincoat** that covers them from head to toe. This artificial garment helps them adapt to changing weather and external conditions. On the head, a special display allows users to project different facial expressions or even change how old they appear. The design is casual, but its length adjusts automatically based on the weather. The raincoat only becomes visible with the first drop of rain. It represents both adaptability and emotional expression—offering a controlled way to show feelings and identity in a society where appearing a certain way matters more than being yourself.

Another group imagined a lonely future where **society has dissolved, and people live in isolation**. Once again, technology has advanced so rapidly that it blurs the line between what is real and what is virtual, leaving people confused and disconnected. In this world, the soul and nature are considered sacred, while **an AI-driven system governs life**, placing the image and preservation of nature above human needs. With human connection nearly lost, the group envisioned a **versatile shoe** that **responds to and connects with the emotions of fellow passengers, AI systems, and the natural environment**. The design incorporates nanotechnology, biotechnology, AI, and smart sensors to create an interactive, emotionally aware artifact.

In a pessimistic future, environmental collapse threatens the **survival of the human race**. Many people feel hopeless, questioning whether humanity even deserves to survive. Society is **deeply unequal**, divided between the privileged few and the struggling majority. In this world, self-preservation is valued above community and collective well-being.

To adapt to these conditions, the group envisioned a **full-body raincoat** integrated with a protective helmet. The helmet contains advanced filters to clean dust and toxins from the air, allowing the wearer to breathe safely. The area around the face is made of materials that adjust to changing environmental conditions. The suit features moss-covered sleeves and pant legs to naturally filter the air, while screens and integrated lighting offer visibility and communication. Most of the suit is covered in solar panels, providing a sustainable energy source for its functions.



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In a future where AI rules every aspect of life, people struggle to **distinguish the virtual from the real**. Creativity and free will have become luxuries, tightly controlled by intelligent systems that no longer collaborate with humans but dictate their choices. **Natural resources are scarce**, the environment is collapsing, and nature seems to be striking back. As the environmental condition become worse and worse, society fragments into competing power centers, each trying to survive in a world **shaped by fear, scarcity, and control**. In this reality, a transparent, holographic backpack offers a rare sense of **safety and autonomy**. It can vanish and reappear at the owner's command—a simple clap—and only the owner can touch or open it. Minimalist by design, it carries only essential items: water, nuts, a cellphone, a laptop, and a credit card if needed. Lightweight and secure, the backpack reflects a new way of living: private, mobile, and prepared for survival in an unstable world.

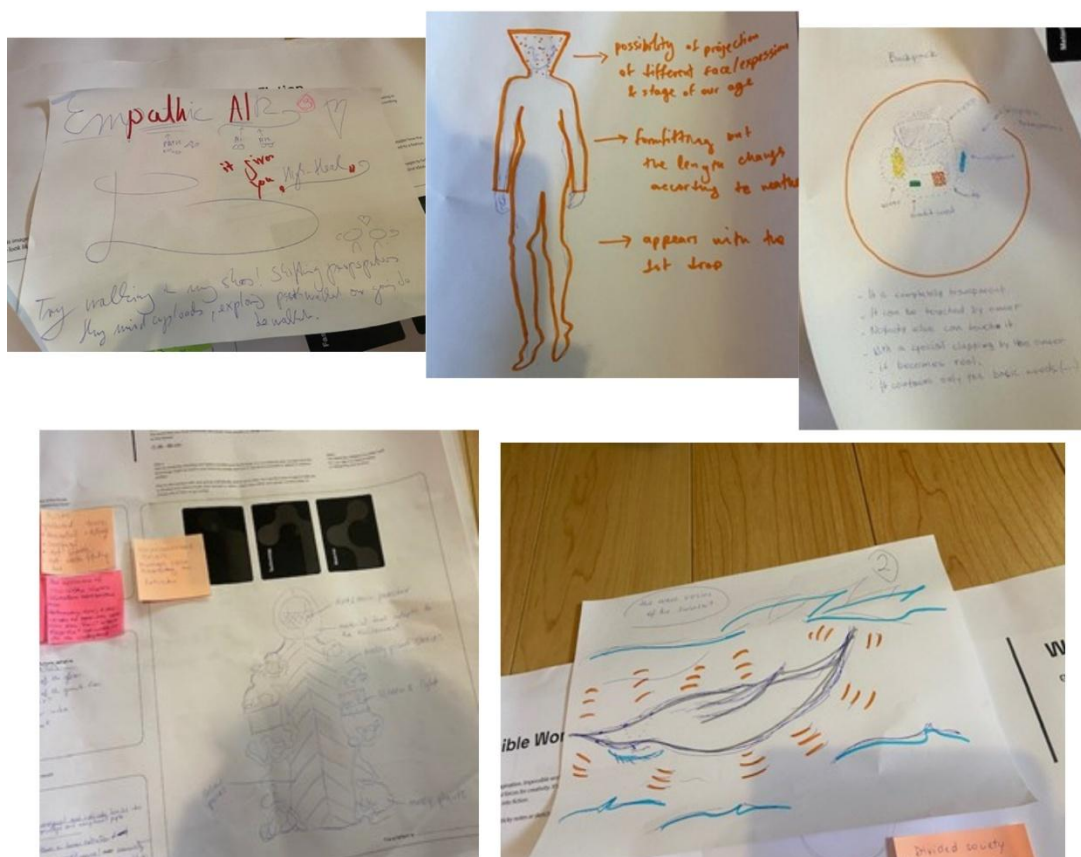


Figure 2 : Photographs from the workshop



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3.4 Fashion Futuring Wheel

3.4.1 Manufacturing & Distribution

Future fashion systems are envisioned as **decentralized, personalized, and embedded within local contexts**. Concepts like **zero-waste manufacturing** and **anti-mass production** were suggested, revealing a desire to move away from overproduction and towards models that allow for custom-made, small-scale, or even user-generated garments. Technology is expected to play a significant role in fashion manufacturing and distribution, with the integration of **AI, blockchain, and 3D printing** emerging as tools. These systems are imagined not to replace human labor, but to support more sustainable and humane ways of making fashion, often rooted in local value chains and ecological awareness.

3.4.2 Environment, Social Responsibility, and Governance (ESG)

Participants imagine a system where **reduced carbon footprints, water preservation, and circular economy principles** are the foundations of economic activity. In parallel, there is an expectation of greater public **engagement in demanding change—translated as social pressure on governments and policy frameworks** in order to accelerate the adoption of sustainable practices. Ethical consumption is not framed as a luxury but as a necessity towards a sustainable future.

3.4.3 Arts & Philosophy

The theme of **Arts and Philosophy** brings a more human-centered and reflective dimension to fashion futuring. Participants called for a return **to foundational philosophical ideas**—particularly those rooted in Greek thought—and a **rebalancing of fashion towards emotion, care, and artistic expression**. Fashion is seen not only as a means of aesthetic pleasure, but as a tool for self-inquiry, community building, and critique of social inequalities. The focus shifts away from fashion as status and returns to fashion as craft, emotion, and meaning.

3.4.4 Education & Politics

Participants suggested that education systems should prioritize **ethics, emotional intelligence, and creative autonomy**—what was referred to as “**caring ethics**”. Learning will no longer be about technical skills alone but includes a **deeper engagement** with values, histories, and craft traditions. There was a

strong emphasis on the importance **of individuality in learning paths**, with **specialization and deep study** seen as essential tools for self-expression and innovations to emerge in society and economy.

3.4.5 Consumption & Trends

The theme of Consumption and Trends reflects an increasing desire for intentional, value-driven consumer behavior. Participants imagined a world in which clothing is purchased for longevity, **emotional value, and ethical alignment, rather than status or novelty**. **Minimalism, durability, and individual preference** are emphasized over mass trends or overconsumption. There is also an **awareness of the potential risks**—some participants warned of catastrophic outcomes if overconsumption and environmental neglect persist.

3.4.6 Communication

In terms of communication, the future of fashion **marketing and storytelling is imagined to be more honest, emotional, and individualized**. Participants noted the importance of **moving away from mass branding and toward personal storytelling** that reflects lived experiences and ethical commitments. **Empathy and authenticity become central notions in communication strategies**, with nature-based values and emotional resonance being at the core of them.

3.4.7 Design Principles

Within design principles, participants argued that **zero-waste and circular design approaches** will be foundational, with garments designed for **versatility and longevity**. Design is not only functional but also **symbolic**—some suggested that the shapes of garments could be used to **express social inequalities**, such as basic forms for everyone and more complex ones for the privileged, **thereby sparking dialogue about equity and access**. Above all, design is seen as a medium through which **protection, adaptability, and human connection are communicated**.



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3.4.8 Materials, Science & Technology

Material innovation will be one of the most important aspects for the future of fashion industry and manufacturing in general. **Biotechnology, nanotechnology, and living materials** are seen as promising pathways to reduce waste and build regenerative systems. Participants expressed enthusiasm about **biodegradable and eco-friendly textiles, as well as smart fabrics that can respond to the body or environment.**



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4 General Impact

The Future of Sustainable Fashion workshop provided valuable insights into the interplay between sustainability, technology, and societal values within the fashion industry. Central points of discussion were digital technologies, environmental sustainability and inclusivity, trajectories linked with the triple transition of the EU.

Environmental sustainability in the fashion industry was addressed intensely, through a range of optimistic and forward-thinking developments in fashion industry. These include the adoption of circular economy principles, the growing popularity of thrifting and second-hand markets, the desire for zero-waste manufacturing techniques, and the innovation of new eco-friendly materials. The last argument also reflects a strong interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly between fashion and scientific fields such as biotechnology and nanotechnology, in the development of sustainable raw materials. Moreover, the shift toward environmentally responsible practices is closely tied to evolving consumer values, as ethical considerations in purchasing—especially the embrace of second-hand clothing—indicate a broader cultural move toward more conscious and sustainable consumption patterns.

Digital technologies emerged as a double-edged influence in the fashion landscape. On one hand, the integration of AI and digital tools throughout the fashion value chain—depicted through the responsive artefacts and fashion timeline with the integration of smart textiles—demonstrates the sector's increasing need for technological modernization. On the other hand, the workshop critically examined how these technologies reshape human relationships, sometimes reinforcing social isolation and redefining our connection with the natural world. Fashion, in this context, becomes a reflective medium that both responds to and critiques these societal transformations.

Inclusivity also featured prominently, with fashion recognized as a powerful tool for articulating both individual and collective identities. As new and emerging identities gain visibility, fashion serves as a dynamic platform for representation and belonging in a rapidly changing world.

The broader impact of the workshop underscores fashion's potential to:

- Encourage a shift toward ethical consumption and environmentally responsible practices in production
- Reconsider social norms, social sexes and connection
- Raise awareness of the social and ethical implications of uncritical adoption of digital and AI technologies.

According to the participants, the most significant barriers to change are the **fear of change** itself and the **prevailing mindset** surrounding fashion production and consumption—both of which are reinforced by the current educational system.

To enable meaningful transformation, change should begin within the "first communities" individuals are part of: the family and the school. One notable suggestion was the idea of **"feeling over doing,"** emphasizing the importance of recognizing and evaluating our emotions as a fundamental part of the decision-making process. Additionally, experimentation was highlighted as a critical driver of change, serving not only as a method but as a **mindset** essential for progress.



Figure 3 : Photographs from the workshop



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