FAST FASHION - The Solution Is … In Your Neighbourhood Bin!

When was the last time you bought clothes?
Maybe you do not remember but we know how many you threw away!
About 5.8 million tons of fabric are thrown away every year in Europe - equivalent to 11.3 kilos per person. The big increase in the amount of clothes produced and thrown away is the result of fast fashion, which is the continuous change of styles and the purchase of modern clothes at low prices.

Fast Fashion: Glamorous, but not innocent.
Fashion is considered to be the second most polluting industry in the world, after the extraction of oil. More specifically, it has the fourth highest impact on the environment and climate change after food, housing, and transportation.

- Use of water: According to research in the E.U. the world textiles and clothing industry used 79 billion cubic metres of water in 2015. 2,700 litres of water are necessary for a top to be produced, which is the amount of drinking water a person consumes in 2.5 years.

- Water pollution – microplastic litter: It is calculated that about 20% of world water pollution is because of the dyeing of products and their finish. Microplastic litter, which is released in water every time we wash a synthetic piece of cloth (polyester, nylon), is eaten by fish, and in this way, plastic is introduced into the human food chain.

- Greenhouse gas emission: The Fashion industry is responsible for 10% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions and contributes to greenhouse phenomenon. The production of textile products produces more carbon dioxide than all international flights and shipping together.

- Deforestation: more than 140 million trees are cut down every year in order to produce fabrics, like rayon and viscose.

- Sanitary landfill with textile waste: "Sand dunes" of clothes are created in Ghana and Chile. Clothes cemeteries lead to the "death" of the atmosphere.

Scientists point out…

Mr Ioannis Mpinietoglou, a physicist and expert on methods of atmospheric remote sensing who works in Clean Air Task Force, an international NGO that fights against climate change implications, points out:
"We rarely think of the end of life of old clothes even if, as happens with all trash, we continue living next to them for many years after we throw them away. According to how they deal with trash in your area, the clothes we throw in the rubbish end up in a landfill or in a sanitary landfill at best.
Clothes which are thrown away produce gas, like methane, with catastrophic results for the Earth's climate. Methane is a strong greenhouse gas: in the first 20 years that it appears in the atmosphere, it traps more that 80 times more energy than the same amount of carbon dioxide. As a result, methane has already caused 30% of the Earth's

temperature increase and it is responsible for the increase of extreme weather conditions."

Students inform. The Municipality shares.

For every problem's solution awareness comes first. So representatives from the Municipality of Komotini, the Environmental Department, informed students about the ecological footprint of clothes on an international level, and about recycling in our town.

Mr Fotis Tsagkas told students about solid waste management. Ms Theodosia Dragoumani pointed out that most clothes today are made of synthetic fabrics, like elastic, nylon, microfiber which need many years to decompose, in contrast to natural fabrics like cotton and wool. This waste ends up in the clothing "graveyards" in the Atacama Desert in Chile creating an invisible, environmental threat.

Briefing of students about recycling from the representatives of the Municipality of Komotini. (Student Photo)

The solution to this worldwide problem starts with the local community.

According to the information given by Ms Chrysanthi Makri, the Municipality of Komotini signed an agreement with the East West Greece company in 2020, and 30 clothes recycling bins were put around the town and they are about to put 10 more. In these bins citizens recycle clothes, shoes, blankets, curtains, bed sheets, pillows, children's toys and generally whatever is made of fabric. The citizens' response is reflected in the numbers: from 61,34 tons of clothes which were collected in 2021to 79,27 tons of clothes in 2022.

Clothes recycling bin outside the Public Library of Komotini. (Student Photo)

What we gain by recycling our clothes

- Reduce the total amount of domestic waste.
- Gain from not having extra charges on municipal taxes.
- Reduce the waste of energy.
- Strengthen ecological consciousness and improve life conditions in the Municipality of Komotini.

Students provide solutions

The problem is real, but there are solutions, and they can start from school and our neighbourhood as the actions of students at the 3rd Experimental High School of Komotini have shown.

"We give a second life to our old clothes – we make your old one … my new one."

During the European week for Waste Reduction, which was about raising an awareness of Fabric Product Management, students at the Environmental Club of the 3rd Experimental High School in Komotini, spoke to their classmates about recycling, collecting and remaking clothes so they could be reused. The aim of these actions, as a student E. Kyriakopoulou said, was that at the end nothing would be wasted and thrown away in the trash.

Students making a rug with old clothes. (Student Photo)

So, they cut, sewed, and made rugs, beds and cushions for animals, small toys for pets (dogs and cats), and Christmas ornaments. The mascot of this action was a fabric whale which was "fed" with all the left-over fabrics.

The whale which is fed with the leftovers of fast fashion, creation by Evdokia Kyriakopoulou. (Student Photo)

The students practice **"the ten rules of the consumer"**:

1. Do not buy clothes unless the old ones are worn out.
2. Prioritize our needs and buy only what is necessary.
3. Get informed and inform our friends about the consequences of fast fashion.
4. Donate our clothes instead of throwing them away.
5. Exchange clothes with friends.
6. Remake our old clothes.
7. Buy from secondhand shops instead of big international brands.
8. Recycle old clothes.

9. Choose clothes which are made from recycled and environmentally friendly materials.
10. Love our clothes and take care of them.

These are the requirements for a better future, without an environmental footprint!

Webography

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3rd Experimental High School of Komotini
Students' names:

1. Aneulavi Efstathia
2. Kourtidi Georgianna
3. Mpatziou Evelina
4. Ntouza Georgia
5. Pachoumi Christina
6. Stroumpakidis Stefanos
7. Tziotziou Zoe
8. Tziotziou Sofia
9. Tsakiri Rafaelia
10. Tsamourtzi Anthi
11. Tsartsali Antonia
12. Charalampidi Evdoxia