



Collective Mending

Sustainable Challenge 2025

12-15 November 2025
Disseny Hub Barcelona

Summary

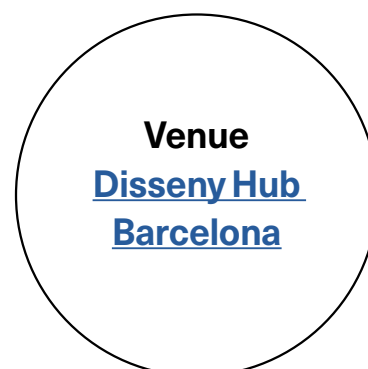
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Overview

The Sustainable Challenge is an annual project organised by FAD (Fostering Arts and Design) in collaboration with the Barcelona City Council, the Dutch Embassy in Spain, and the Catalan Government. The project aims to generate knowledge and proposals for the sustainable development of the fashion industry.

Each year, thirty students from fashion schools from Spain, Netherlands and across Europe are invited to design using the participatory design methodology to understand other perspectives beyond their own, with the support of industry experts and mentors.

The project is based on the vision that sustainable development must take place simultaneously in three areas: social, environmental and economic. This vision is the basis for the Sustainable Challenge's triple agenda: environmental, which includes our interaction with nature; social, where the goal is to provide people with the opportunity to meet their basic needs, a sense of worth and the protection of their rights; and economic, where we seek a balance between meeting financial needs and preserving the planet for future generations. Each edition of the Sustainable Challenge is based on the foundations of this agenda and each year it adopts a theme, which this year is the Collective Mending perspective in fashion.



1. Edition 2025

Under the title of “Collective Mending”, in the context of a creative marathon, thirty fashion students from all over Europe will work together to explore the creative possibilities of a speculative mending-focused fashion system. They will be invited to engage with an unconventional form of fashion design: one that puts an individual garment, in need of repair, at centre stage.

2. Mending, Fashion Design and Sustainability

The globalised mainstream fashion system is characterised by staggering levels of overproduction and overconsumption, which are linked to countless negative environmental and social impacts. Growing awareness of these issues has prompted diverse initiatives in industrial, community and civic settings. While some initiatives concentrate on production, others seek to address the growing volumes of clothing already in existence, and particularly those items that fall out of use for a variety of reasons. This edition of the Sustainable Challenge focuses on mending, a term that we use to refer to the repair of a garment from the wardrobe – that is, belonging to a specific individual – to keep it in active use.

Mending is, of course, nothing new. For a long time, mending was a commonplace part of fashion practice. As fabrics were precious, repair skills were valued – particularly in times of scarcity, such as during the rationing of World War II. As clothing became more abundant in the global North in the second half of the twentieth century, mending became more marginal. For most people in this context mending, if practised at all, is limited to small tasks such as replacing buttons and sewing up hems. Yet the near-

extinction of textile repair in its traditional guise has cleared the way for a new wave of mending over the past fifteen years. Today, a growing number of people are learning to darn and patch their clothes from YouTube videos and recently published how-to books, while brands are showcasing repair services through in-store installations.

These new mending practices are disrupting the values and assumptions of a consumerist fashion system. We see established techniques mingling with inventive new approaches and a taste for visible mending, which sociologist Richard Sennett would describe as 'dynamic' repair¹. This type of repair seeks to transform the item into something different, unlike static repair that seeks to return an item to its original state. A dynamic approach can involve multiple mends, with the garment evolving over time. As Brian Eno notes, 'humans have a taste for things that not only show that they have been through a process of evolution, but which show they are still part of one. They are not dead yet.'²

Today, the cultural meanings of mending are complex. Although mending might now be seen as an indicator of creativity and environmental consciousness, a longstanding association of repair with poverty still lingers. And the rationale for mending today, in a time of overabundance, is different to that of the past. When it is easy and inexpensive to replace an item, people tend to think carefully about what is worth repairing. We might even extend the idea of mending beyond the repair of physical damage to include the repair of an item's aesthetic appeal or personal meaning.

In design terms, mending is a fascinating process, inherently contingent and open-ended. As Tim Dant describes, 'its actual demands only emerge as the work progresses'³: the process inevitably involves uncertainty.

In contrast, in industrial clothing production every steps planned in advance to remove any element of risk. Furthermore, mending requires the designer to respond to the needs of an individual garment. Christopher Alexander's writing about the repair and alteration of buildings applies equally well to the fashion context: at every moment we use the defects of the present state as the starting point for the definition of the new state'⁴. In fact, the designer of mending must also respond to the needs and preferences of the garment's wearer. This approach is quite unlike conventional fashion design practice, in which the designer can start from a blank page, work with virgin materials and cater for a generic consumer profile. In design for mending, then, the existing garment and its wearer's needs are placed ahead of the designer's creative ideas; the designer must become, in a way, more humble.

This is a significant shift, which challenges the emphasis within fashion culture on individual originality and endless possibility. While mending may seem to be a niche concern, this shift has wider relevance: it exemplifies a change that will be needed if we are to develop truly sustainable fashion systems. Such systems would involve a radical reduction in resource use, of up to 75–95% according to expert estimates⁵. To live with less, we have to be resourceful; to be resourceful, we have to be willing to work with things that already exist, to adapt to their materiality and the possibilities and limitations that they carry. Mending therefore provides a valuable space for thinking and practising differently as designers, of practising humbleness and negotiation with existing things while still exercising our creative thinking and aesthetic flair.

Although mending offers an exciting creative opportunity for designers and an opportunity to develop vital new forms of practice, in today's economic system it is difficult to imagine widespread professional creative repair services.

In the global North today, labour is expensive in comparison with materials; professional repair, which takes time and must be executed locally, will inevitably be expensive when compared to new clothing that is mass-produced in areas of the world where people are paid far less. This has not always been the case. In historical eras in which repair and refashioning were commonplace, materials were expensive in comparison with the cost of labour.

In order to create an empowering space to explore the creative world of dynamic mending, in the Sustainable Challenge we will draw on Fashion Fictions, an international participatory speculation project that invites people to explore fictional fashion systems. Together, we will step into a parallel world in which professional mending is economically viable, widespread, diverse and thriving, with specialist mending salons cooperating to provide a comprehensive repair service for the local community. We'll ask each participant to enact their role as a designer-mender in this parallel world, using their creativity not only to design mends with contemporary appeal but also to build, in our three days together, a shared vision of how an alternative fashion system might be organised.

¹ Richard Sennett (2008), **The Craftsman** (London: Penguin), p.200.

² Quoted in Stewart Brand (1994), **How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built** (New York: Viking), p.11.

³ Tim Dant, (2010), **The work of repair: gesture, emotion and sensual knowledge**, Sociological Research Online, 15 (3), p.7.

⁴ Christopher Alexander (1979), **The Timeless Way of Building** (New York: Oxford University Press), p.485.

⁵ Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham (2019), **Earth Logic Fashion Action Research Plan** (London: The J J Charitable Trust), p.45.

3. Curated Readings

Markus Berger & Kate Irvin (eds.) (2022), [Repair: Sustainable Design Futures](#) (Abingdon: Routledge).

Iryna Kucher (2024), [Designing Engagements with Mending: An exploration of amateur clothing repair practices in Western and post-Soviet contexts](#) (Kolding: Designskolen Kolding).

Jonnet Middleton (2015), 'Mending', in Kate Fletcher and Mathilda Tham (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Sustainability and Fashion* (Abingdon: Routledge), pp.262–74.

Celia Pym (2022), [On Mending: Stories of Damage and Repair](#) (Stroud: Quickthorn Books).

Amy Twigger Holroyd (2015), 'Re-knitting: the emotional experience of opening knitted garments', *The Journal of Design Strategies* 7(1), pp.112-9.

Amy Twigger Holroyd (2020), [Folk Fashion: Understanding Homemade Clothes](#) (London: Bloomsbury).

4. Participation

The Sustainable Challenge is a non-formal training and learning project aimed at fashion design students. It is open to fashion students attending schools from Spain and the Netherlands (thanks to the support of the [Dutch Embassy](#)), and with some places reserved for students from across Europe, studying for undergraduate, graduate or master's degrees in design, pattern cutting, styling, communication and other disciplines.

From among applicants, the organisation will choose thirty students that will work in different teams made up of participants from different specialities and countries. The aim is to generate in the students a skillset and experience that will allow them, once they are professionals, to identify other critical perspectives under the necessary demands for social justice and sustainability in the fashion industry.

Participation is free of charge and the organisation provides and funds accommodation and daily allowances of participants during the days of the Sustainable Challenge as well as the travel expenses. The organisation will not cover transfers to and from the airports or main train/bus stations. The format is intensive and is based on the practice of sharing. In this regard, participation involves cohabitation as a group, communal dynamics and the use of shared resources (accommodation, food, material resources, etc.).

Once the challenge has been completed and the assessment questionnaire has been filled out, participants will be awarded a participation certificate issued by the organisers.

5. Creative Marathon

The Sustainable Challenge 2025 will take place on the 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th of November 2025 in Barcelona, in the Disseny Hub Barcelona building.

It will be a research and creation marathon, where new approaches and different proposals will be developed. These will include a divergent stance on how industrial fashion design is constructed, in order to co-create alternatives to the specific problems that affect fashion today.

The Sustainable Challenge is not a competition between teams, so there will be no winners or losers.

What we are looking for are proposals with a critical perspective in line with the aims of the Challenge, which will enrich the knowledge and life experience of all participants. Participants will be supported by expert tutors who will help them throughout the process to shape the proposals they have to develop.

Each team will work on the design and construction of a complete look. At the end of the session on 15 November, the teams will present their projects in a “fashion show” open to the community.

A photo session will be organised as a fashion editorial with the aim of publishing it.

The final designs of the different working groups will remain in the custody of the organisers and may be exhibited at the Disseny Hub Barcelona in the first semester of 2026.

6. Calendar



7. Curatorship

Amy Twigger Holroyd

Associate Professor of Fashion and Sustainability at Nottingham School of Art & Design.

Through design-led participatory research, Twigger explores plural possibilities for post-growth fashion systems: alternative ways of living with our clothes that meet our fundamental human needs and respect ecological limits.

She was awarded the Philip Leverhulme Prize for Visual & Performing Arts in 2024.

Expert Tutors

In addition to the curatorship, the participants will be supported by expert tutors who will guide them throughout the process. Their names will be released during the open call period.

8. Registration Key Dates

The event will take place in person at FAD's headquarters (Disseny Hub Barcelona) from 12 to 15 November 2025.

The students are invited to [submit their application online](#) by 28 September 2025 and to explain why we should keep a place open for them in this year's challenge. Read on to obtain more details.

Application deadline


Sunday 28 September

Notification of selected candidates

Friday 3 October

Confirmation of participation by the student
(required)

Monday 6 October



**To apply,
please complete
this [online form](#)**

MODA-FAD

About

MODA-FAD is a collective of professionals from the different areas of fashion. They constitute the Fashion section of the FAD ([Fostering Arts and Design](#)) and share the enthusiasm of promoting and giving visibility to creators, to fashion businesses and to new talent by fostering a positive impact through the values of sustainability.

The institution promotes initiatives that boost creative excellence, commercial drive, economic reactivation and responsible consumption, and works to become a touchstone as a source of information, inspiration and networking for professionals in all areas of the industry: fashion and accessories design, styling, communication, photography and entrepreneurship.

The Fostering Arts and Design federation comprises a series of not-for-profit associations, professional organisations and companies operating within the field of design.

The fundamental belief that underlies this initiative is the potential of design to enhance the quality of life for individuals and communities. To this end, we allocate our resources to the promotion of creative culture, the support of new generations, and the stimulation of excellence in the domains of product design, architecture, fashion, graphic design, visual communication, craftsmanship, and the arts in general.

The FAD is further supported by five associations representing diverse creative disciplines, in addition to a materials centre.

A-FAD: Association of Artists and Artisans

ADG-FAD: Association of Graphic Design and Visual Communication

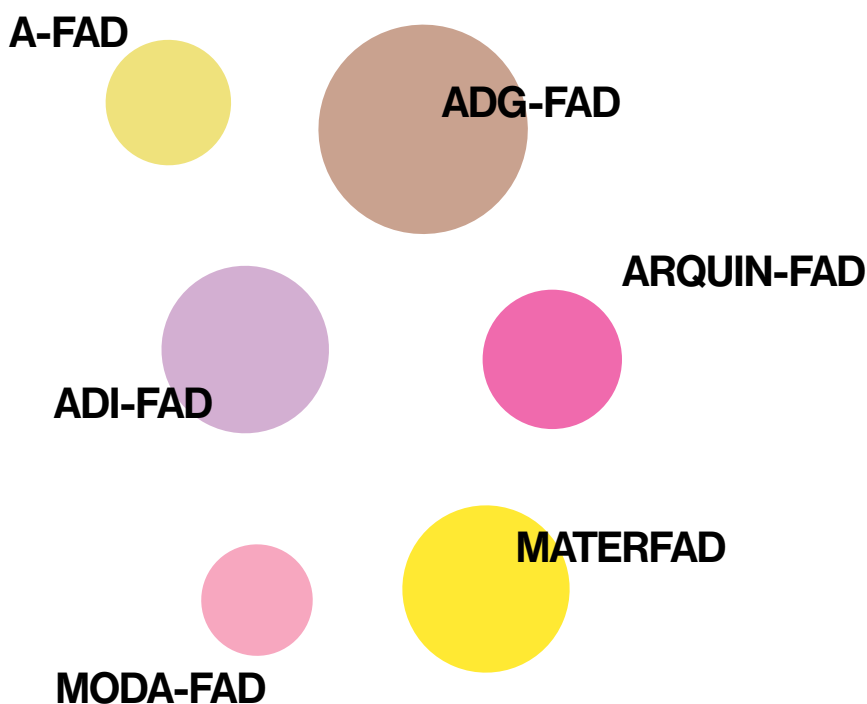
ADI-FAD: Industrial Design Association

ARQUIN-FAD: Interdisciplinary Association of Space Design

MODA-FAD: FAD Fashion Community

MATERFAD: Barcelona Materials Centre

Moreover, the FAD houses the headquarters of the Art Directors Club of Europe (ADCE) within its premises.



Legal Conditions

Terms and Conditions

The organisation declines all responsibility with regard to the authenticity of the information provided by the participants on the registration form and in the credits.


The organisation reserves the right to request proof of enrolment, registration or assessment from the school or teacher supervising the application submitted.

Personal data protection

Any personal data provided will be kept as long as the relationship established in the terms of this call is maintained, the participant does not request their deletion or they are needed for the purposes of processing them. At present, no automated decisions of any kind will be taken, including the creation of profiles based on personal data.

The data will not be transferred unless it is strictly necessary for the fulfilment of the above-mentioned purposes or in order to comply with a legal obligation. The data will not be transferred to countries outside the European Union and UK unless it is strictly necessary for the purposes stated above and the participant has given prior express consent for such transfer.

The rights listed below may be exercised at any time by writing to "FAD", Pl. Les Glòries Catalanes, 37-38, Edif. Disseny Hub Barcelona, 08018 Barcelona; or by e-mail to fad@fad.cat. Users have the right to access, rectify, restrict, transfer, oppose and cancel their personal data.



[Visit the
Sustainable
Challenge
website](#)

Selected applicants

All the confirmed participants will receive a form with precise terms and conditions to be acknowledged and required to comply.

Participation in the call for the Sustainable Challenge 2025 implies full acceptance of these conditions.

Sponsors



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