

**SUSTAINABILITY MANAGEMENT IN TEXTILES – A NEW GENERATION OF MANAGERS IS EMERGING**
**INTERVIEW WITH SONJA AMPORT, DIRECTOR OF THE STF SWISS TEXTILE & FASHION INSTITUTE**

Contact restrictions, mandatory use of face masks, home office: The Coronavirus has turned our daily lives upside down and reduced public life almost to zero. The impact of the pandemic has even further increased the existing pressure for action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. And that is why, it is not surprising that the issues of sustainability, climate protection and digitization are gaining ground in the industry's and consumers' awareness. New management qualities are required. Textination talked to Sonja



Amport, Director of the STF Swiss Textile & Fashion Institute, about the new training course CAS Sustainability Management in Textiles. After career experiences in the industry and in associations, the business economist with a master's degree in International Management has been contributing her knowledge of textiles, education, business administration, as well as marketing and sales to STF with vigor and passion since 2015.

**The history of the STF Swiss Textile & Fashion Institute began in 1881. In this year Pablo Picasso was born and Billy the Kid was shot. The Tales of Hoffmann by Jacques Offenbach was premiered and Thomas Alva Edison built the world's first electric power station. The Breuninger department store opened at Stuttgart's market square and Rudolph Karstadt's first store in Wismar. What led to the foundation of STF during this period of time and what values do you still feel committed to today?**

In 1881, the textile industry in Switzerland was thriving. Companies in the sector of spinning, weaving, finishing and others burgeoned. However, there was a shortage of trained specialists who could have operated or repaired the machines. This is why the companies teamed up and founded the STF Swiss Textile & Fashion Institute - a place for education and training of specialists for the Swiss textile and clothing industry. For this reason, the STF is still organized as a cooperative today. Therefore, we are still committed to the values of competence, customer orientation, innovation, inspiration and passion to this day.



Sonja Amport, Director, STF



Meeting rooms at the STF



One of the sewing workshops at STF



STF students during the lesson

**If you had to introduce your educational institution in 100 words to someone who doesn't know the STF Swiss Textile & Fashion Institute: How does the school define itself today and on which fields of activity does it focus?**

The STF Swiss Textile & Fashion Institute stands for sustainable educational competence covering the entire

life cycle of a textile, fashion or lifestyle product. With the "STF-LAB", the STF positions itself as an educational service provider with three business fields. The core field is "Education", where the STF offers numerous training and further education courses, from basic education to bachelor's and master's degrees. In the "Incubator & Makerspace" (STF Studio), the main focus is on shared infrastructure, mutual inspiration and the thereby together achieved progress. In the third business field, "Think Tank & Consulting", the school acts as a think tank, where experts can be "hired" and part-time management is offered.



Industrial flat knitting machine at STF, one of over 50 different textile industrial machines which can be rented for use by external parties.

**Keyword life-long education: What further education programs does the STF offer for the textile and clothing industry, even after a successful degree?**

**Which industry sectors and which countries are you focusing on?**



Insight into the work on a buttonhole machine

Firstly, we offer a variety of informal modular courses for the textile and clothing industry as well as retail, in which one can achieve a good overview of a specific topic within 45 lessons. Such as: Welding & Bonding, Smart & Functional Textiles, Start-up in Fashion or the Steiger Stitch Module, where you learn to program your own knitting designs and then knit them on a "Shared Machine" at STF. We also offer two-week intensive summer courses each year, for example in Sustainable Fashion Design. In terms of formal education, I can recommend our master's

program in Product Management Fashion & Textile in German or our two CAS in Sustainability Management in Textiles. Once with face-to-face classes in German and once via e-learning in English. At the moment, we are focusing our programs on Germany, Austria and Switzerland (DACH region). Our internationalization strategy was abruptly stopped due to Covid-19. With our English master's programs, we were focusing particularly on the Indian and Chinese markets We are now strategically repositioning ourselves with English

language courses and will start marketing again from 2022 onwards. The goal is to provide flexible, modular master's programs with a high e-learning component, so that costs remain moderate and travelling can be reduced.



Moodboard, STF Upcycling project "Urban Jungle"



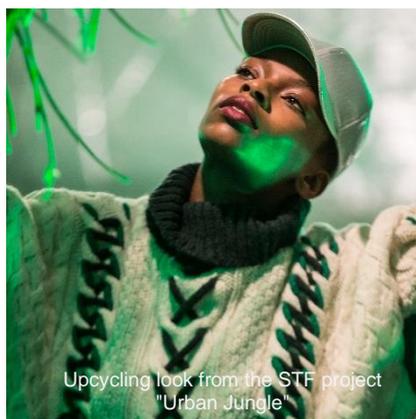
Upcycling look from the STF project "Urban Jungle"

**Sustainability has changed from a buzzword to a matter of course: The latest OTTO Trend Study even says, that sustainable consumption has entered the mainstream society. What does this mean for the textile and clothing industry? Are the companies positioned in terms of personnel in such a way, that they have professionally incorporated this complex of topics into their service portfolio?**

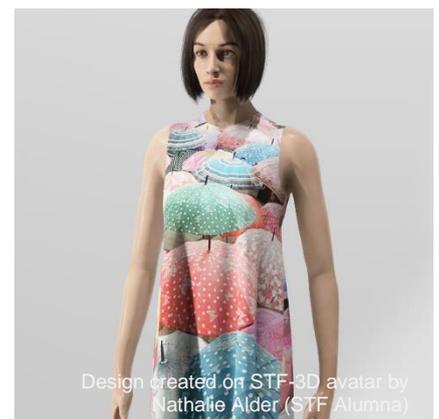
Swiss companies have recognized, that they only have a chance against foreign competitors, if they are capable of innovation, consistently operating in a niche and can stand out through sustainable production. Sustainability is therefore an absolutely central USP. With this in mind, many companies are dealing this and, of course, also send their employees to us for further training.



Upcycling look from the STF project "Urban Jungle"



Upcycling look from the STF project "Urban Jungle"



Design created on STF-3D avatar by Nathalie Alder (STF Alumna)

**The STF offers - so far being the only one in the German-speaking area - an internationally recognized further education in the field of Sustainability Management in Textiles as a Certificate of Advanced Studies CAS. Which sub-areas from design, production, process optimization to marketing does the certificate cover?**

The STF offers the internationally recognized University of Applied Sciences certificate in collaboration with SUPSI, the Scuola Universitaria Professionale della Svizzera Italiana in Ticino.

In the degree program, we look from a holistic perspective and at the entire value chain of a textile, i.e. from design to production and to marketing, global challenges, where sustainability acts as a multilateral solution. In addition, the normative and strategic management of sustainability, topics related to social responsibility as well as initiatives and standards for the textile industry are highlighted. An important element of the CAS are raw materials and products, i.e. not only sustainable fibers but also fabrics or the use of chemical agents. Last but not least, aspects around biodiversity, animal welfare, marketing, labeling as well as possible future scenarios and best practice examples are highlighted.

**“ We consider ourselves a pioneer in e-learning and digitalization across Europe.**

**Who could be interested in the CAS Sustainability Management in Textiles and why? What impact can the certificate have on a career?**



The CAS is attractive for managers who are generally concerned about the strategic orientation of a company, as well as for specialist employees in design, product development, purchasing, sales or quality management who are responsible for operationalizing the sustainability strategy. And of course we always welcome young designers with their own fashion labels willing to break new, sustainable grounds and to stand out from the rest. The push in professional life is strongly related to one's own personality. So far, however, all graduates have found attending the further education program to be extremely beneficial for their own career paths.

**What about the formal aspects of the CAS? For example, are there selection criteria, by when do you have to register, what does the curriculum look like, and what are the fees for attendants?**

We start the educational courses at the end of August each year. Early registration, preferably by mid-May, is recommended to secure a place. In the face-to-face course, 120 lessons take place in Zurich and Ticino,



"HAY Lab" as well as workspace for students at STF.

costs of CHF 5,900. -, including teaching materials and examination fees, can be expected. In the e-learning course, with a few days of on-site attendance, the content is taught synchronously by Microsoft Teams, usually by the same lecturers. Here, the fee is CHF 5,600. These costs do not include personal expenses as well as travel and accommodation costs.

Those who are interested can find the facts & figures on our homepage (available in German only):

([www.stf.ch/kurse/cas](http://www.stf.ch/kurse/cas) or [www.stf.ch/kurse/cas-online](http://www.stf.ch/kurse/cas-online))

**The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown us the limitations of mobility. How have you responded to this as an educational institution?**

Physical limitations can easily be overcome with e-learning. One of the reasons why our classes continued regularly throughout the pandemic period. For the period after Covid-19, we are planning, in addition to face-to-face study modules, further online-only seminars, such as our CAS-Online. These will be offered increasingly in English as well. We are also currently testing possible forms of hybrid lessons. Meaning, while some are educated on-site in Zurich, people who have to travel a long way, such as those from Germany, Austria and Switzerland (DACH region), can attend the lessons virtually and live from a distance.



STF entrance area and show window, here with looks from the project "Urban Survival".

**The past year has left its mark on the textile and apparel industry. When you look back on a year of "state of emergency" - what positive experiences do you take with you, where do you see a need for improvement?**

It was definitely a year of a state of emergency! One positive aspect is, that we at STF were ready and able

to teach online from day one of the lockdown. The learners, students and my team all showed the greatest understanding and flexibility. But as an institute in the textile, fashion and lifestyle sector, teaching also thrives on visual materials. Being able to feel and smell the yarns and fabrics, as well as to discuss the experiences in person, are important learning experiences. It is definitely a challenge to implement such key learning elements online. Overall, Covid-19 has catapulted us forward as an institution in regards to the topic of digitization by what feels like two years. However, I would be grateful if we could return to normality as soon as possible and to an everyday life with "less distance".



Insight into one of the sewing workshops at the STF

**Breaking new ground means willingness to make decisions, overcoming fears - and thus courage to fail. Not every project can succeed. In retrospect, which decision that you made for the STF profile are you particularly pleased about?**

I'm proud to say that most of the projects we tackle are successful. There is almost always a way. Sometimes, as you move forward, you just have to adjust the direction a bit to get where you want to go. A groundbreaking innovation was certainly the modularization of (almost) all degree programs. Students can therefore benefit from a wide range of choices and create their own curriculum.

A second decision I'm grateful for was that, as a small institute, we invested a lot in expanding our digital capabilities and infrastructure at a very early

stage, which we are now benefiting from. With very well-trained lecturers and a learning platform, a VM platform and modern 3D software in various subject areas, we consider ourselves a pioneer in e-learning and digitalization across Europe. Capabilities, which also pay off in terms of sustainability.

*The interview was conducted by Ines Chucholowius,  
Managing Director of Textination GmbH*

**Further information:**

- Master in Product Management Fashion & Textile  
<https://www.stf.ch/kurse/master-pm/>
- CAS in Sustainability Management in Textiles  
(in German with classroom instruction and in English as an online course of study)  
[www.stf.ch/kurse/cas/](http://www.stf.ch/kurse/cas/) or [www.stf.ch/kurse/cas-online/](http://www.stf.ch/kurse/cas-online/)