

Innovative Solutions for Sustainable Fashion Developed by High School Students from Norrbotten and Northern Finland, February 25–26 in Luleå, Sweden

The Un/Sustainable Fashion event concluded today in Luleå, bringing together over 100 high school students and teachers from Norrbotten and northern Finland. During the two-day exchange, participants collaborated on innovative solutions for the future of fashion. The event culminated in a vibrant fashion show, where students showcased garments, they had created using upcycled materials and fabric scraps, bringing their ideas to life on the catwalk.

The event was part of the Aurora Entrepreneurialis project, which aims to foster entrepreneurial culture, sustainable entrepreneurship, and cross-border collaboration between high schools in the region.

"We've chosen to focus on sustainable fashion for three key reasons," said Linda Strandenhed, project leader at Ung Företagsamhet Norrbotten. "First, we are consuming more and more clothes, and the impact on both people and nature throughout the value chain is very negative. We really need to make a change. Second, clothing is something everyone can relate to, whether it's for its creativity and enjoyment or simply because we all need clothes. Third, this is an area where we – and the students involved – can make a real difference. While many sustainability issues are difficult to address as individuals, here, there's an opportunity to have a tangible impact. There are also many exciting business opportunities in finding new, sustainable ways to use and reuse clothing."

The event began with a lecture by Veronica Wendin from Lumire, who explored the theme *Fashion at All Costs: Who's Paying?* Participants also heard from Malin Åsén of Ung Företagsamhet Norrbotten, who shared her personal journey from "Shopaholic" to "Slow Fashionista." In mixed groups, students visited local businesses and organisations such as Butiken Samlat, Röda Korset in Luleå, and Slöjd och Formcentrum. Through a collaboration with Lumire, students worked hands-on with fabric scraps and upcycled garments to showcase their ideas in practice.

"This project has been running for several years, bringing together schools from Norrbotten and northern Finland. We meet regularly, usually twice per semester, with a small group of students who collaborate on various themes," explained Jonas Carlzon, a teacher at Strömbackaskolan in Piteå. "It's crucial for students to meet others, see different perspectives, and engage with important topics like sustainability and entrepreneurship," he added.

Students' ideas included proposals for clothing deposits, social gatherings where people can meet and repair items together, an app to help people find out the inventory of local second-hand stores, promoting wearing visible repairs on clothes as a positive trend, creating clothing libraries, and offering more opportunities for people to learn how to sew their own clothes, among other solutions.

"It's wonderful how young people from neighbouring countries get to connect and reflect on

global issues together. I've had the chance to meet many new young people from both Finland and Sweden. We have been discussing how the fashion industry could reduce its emissions and how we, as consumers, can influence with our own choices. I like how fast fashion has become more of an embarrassing thing nowadays rather than something cool or desirable." said Saga Rasi, a student from OSYK in Oulu.

"I participated for the first time, and I don't regret it at all! The best part was the fashion show at the end and the presentation of ideas. It was also nice to meet new people." Said Siiri Tirola, Oulun Aikuislukio.

"As a group, we worked really well together and interacted with each other. We learned more about clothes and how to make them. The best thing was finding new friends, even though there were people with different languages in the group. Everyone had a good vibe and the trip was great. We made new friends who we think we will keep in touch with after this trip. So, the end result was a nice trip and we are looking forward to the next exchange" shared the students from Group Four: Nea Kyntömaa (Lappia), Saara Vartiainen (Lappia), Sini Wigley (Muonio Lukio), Hilmi Lapinniemi (Muonio Lukio), Melina Sundqvist (Lapplands Gymnasium Pajala), and Thea Sundqvist (Lapplands Gymnasium Pajala).

"It was great to see how students immersed themselves in group work and the challenges given to them. The teachers, in turn, had a strong collaborative spirit, and we hope that new partnerships will enable cross-border cooperation between schools during the coming academic year." said Pietu Niinimäki, project coordinator at City of Oulu.

"The event gave a new perspective on more ecologically sustainable consumption. For example, I had never heard that it is possible to borrow clothes for free! During company visits, we also got a concrete overview of the side of fashion that usually remains hidden," said Stella Rantala, a student from OSYK.

The Aurora Entrepreneurialis project is led by City of Oulu, Ung Företagsamhet Norrbotten, and the vocational institute Lappia. It is funded by Interreg Aurora, Region Norrbotten, and Lapin Liitto. The three-year project aims to enhance entrepreneurship education at the high school level in Norrbotten and northern Finland. For more information about the project, visit: <https://www.ouka.fi/en/aurora-entrepreneurialis>

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Photo

Bild 1 Teachers sharing their work at Vetenskapens Hus.

Bild 2 Students and teachers at a study visit at Slöjd och Formcenter, Luleå

Bild 3 Students and teachers at a study visit at the Red Cross, Luleå

Bild 4 Students visualising their ideas using clothes waste.

Bild 5: Students and teachers at a study visit at Slöjd och Formcenter, Luleå