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# The People: Sinem Celik, Blu Projects: “Denim today? It's very cost driven. I hope it regains its value”

by Editorial staff — October 03, 2024

7–8 minutes

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*The SPIN OFF* is starting to present a series of interviews with market insiders. Today we present Sinem Celik, a long-time expert of the denim industry, who speaks her projects and her vision of the denim industry.

## **Tell us briefly about your background and experience.**

I was born in Adana, Turkey, in 1979 and studied Chemical Engineering at university. I began my career at Orta Anadolu, where I worked for 16 years. After holding various roles in sales and marketing, I started my own business. I founded Blu Projects with the ambition to focus on sustainable business practices and help grow an awareness of the environmental challenges in the fast-paced fashion industry.

## **What are you doing today?**

I am a sustainability consultant and academician, offering consultancy services on sustainability innovations, strategy, and communication for brands, producers, and organizations. I am a matchmaker and connector between innovation providers and those seeking sustainable solutions.

Furthermore, I also work as an academic and advisor at Mimar Sinan

University, Amsterdam Fashion Institute, and other educational platforms.

## **What is the purpose of Blu Projects?**

I founded Blu Projects eight years ago as a consultancy, learning, and community platform centered around sustainability.

Given that sustainability is often misunderstood and complex, my main purpose is to provide practical tools and guidance to help transform the fashion industry.

I design and manage sustainability strategies for brands and organizations, focusing on enhancing their spheres of influence. This process includes assessment, strategy development, and communication phases.

I collaborate with producers and innovators to translate their technical capabilities into broader networks. For example, I am brand ambassador for \*Refabric\*, an AI-driven fashion platform that simplifies the entire fashion design system, thereby reducing the environmental impact.

I am also a consultant for a concept store, where I craft their sustainability communication and social media language, emphasizing not just products or collections, but a holistic mindset and brand values.

In my academic role, I teach and lead sectoral collaborations, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to shape the future of the industry through these efforts.





BluProjects innovation presentation

### **Where does the denim industry stand now?**

I believe it is currently experiencing some of its toughest years.

However, this should come as no surprise. Having been in the denim industry for over 20 years, I have observed that not much has changed over the years, despite significant challenges posed by global crises, including wars, pandemics, and economic collapses.

Additionally, consumer behavior is undergoing a transformation, with Gen Z exhibiting new shopping habits and redefining retail systems. Interestingly, denim remains one of the most conservative sectors, despite being associated with youth and rebellion.

### **How has it evolved?**

Throughout the 2000s, denim evolved into a material of fast consumption, and unfortunately, we as an industry watched this happen, focusing more on the costings and competition while ignoring the craft of its production and the inherent value.

Take a look at any denim fair, and you'll find racks overflowing with products and evidence of massive overproduction. Sustainable denim has been discussed for many years, but the industry has not committed to environmental or social responsibility over some genuine changes.

It remains cost-driven, primarily led by major retailers. While we all hope to regain the core values of denim, it seems clear that this will take time.

### **What could help the industry gain back its core value?**

I believe a shift in mindset is essential. Rather than continuing the relentless pace of producing vast collections and bring out new designs within mere weeks, the industry should embrace simplicity and the principle of "less is more". It's time to disrupt wasteful cycles and prioritize value over cost, as well as emphasize the importance of long-lasting design.

### **What do you see in the future of denim?**

I envision a future for denim that is vibrant and full of potential. This industry has the power to lead the way in sustainability, redefining how we design clothing. From a product perspective, I foresee significant changes on the horizon, especially with the increasing scarcity of water and the potential obsolescence of traditional laundry technologies. Furthermore, the craftsmanship of denim will be celebrated once again, as the material becomes both limited and valuable.

### **What are the newest sustainable advancements this industry has reached?**

Durability is my answer! We've spent years discussing materials, processes, clean indigo innovations, and so on, but I believe we've forgotten one of denim's core values—it's one of the longest-lasting materials in fashion.

Long wear is the only true antidote to fast fashion. This isn't about venturing into new territory or an advancement, but rather remembering why denim was invented in the first place: to last. And that, in itself, is the most powerful argument for sustainability in fashion.

Another significant advancement for me are re-design and upcycled denim. Embracing circular solutions instead of traditional design is where the future lies. I've been involved in projects that focus solely on using vintage and leftover denim, and the outcomes have been fantastic.

We all need to think more about how to utilize the massive waste that has been created; there's more than enough material to inspire new designs.

### **Where does it stand to be compliant with the upcoming EU sustainable legislation?**

Waste is the number one topic in EU legislation, and circular design practices extend beyond just recycling. We've been discussing innovations in textile recycling for decades, but the data do not support its success. This indicates that we need to think more broadly about circularity. The pressure from EU legislation will push us all to think outside traditional frameworks, and I am very optimistic about this shift.

### **Can you name one or more fashion or jeans brand that you admire because it is acting truly sustainably?**

Mud Jeans and Nudie Jeans are two brands I have been working with and following closely for many years. Beyond their innovations, I



observe a systematic approach in all their activities. They focus not only in their collections but also in developing new retail systems, as well as reuse, repair, and rental models, which positions them as leaders in the sustainable denim field.





Sinem Celik on TED talk stage

Additionally, Freitag provides a highly innovative perspective on upcycling and is very open about sharing their knowledge with anyone interested. In a world where greenwashing is prevalent, these brands give me hope to continue my work in the sustainable field.

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