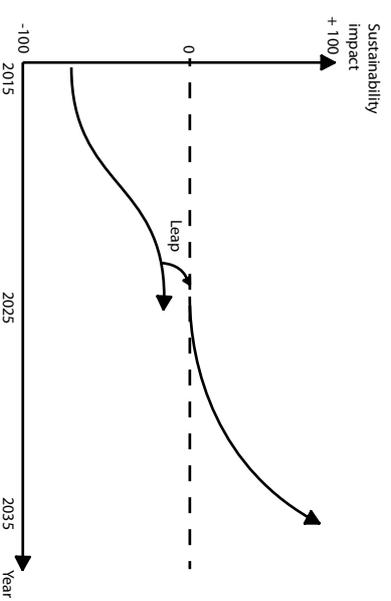


## Re:think - towards positive impact

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Industry data shows that the apparel and textile industry has just started its journey towards a sustainable form. Parts of it have begun to try to play by the planetary rules, understand its own impact, set its targets and should any day now be ready to move towards a more prosperous future where both the environment and society benefit from its presence. Some areas of the industry have come a long way and there are great examples of business and value chains that have reduced their negative environmental impact significantly and contribute to the societies where they operate. The diagram in figure 1 illustrates where the textile and apparel industry is right now and how well it performs in relation to its goals for a sustainable industry circa 2025. -100 on the sustainability impact axis means that not even foundational societal and environmental laws are followed. Zero (0) means zero impact and + means positive impact. However, the industry has come a little bit further than -100; about one third of the goals towards a sustainable industry have been reached and further progress is being made. Many of the targets set by the industry are good, but they are perhaps set a little bit low. Current goals typically include "to minimise negative environmental impact", which is a nice goal but it will not take the industry to the positive impact state we want it to be in. In order to reach a more desirable state of preferably positive impact, the industry needs to start to think in new, more desirable ways and dare to be curious.



### **The way forward**

The it word in the year 2016 is circular economy and is described as “... restorative and regenerative by design, and aims to keep products, components and materials at their highest utility and value at all times. The concept distinguishes between technical and biological cycles.”<sup>1</sup> There is a lot of hope attributed to the circular economy concept, and sustainability leaders in the industry are on the bandwagon, some more on the marketing side and some also on the make it side. Even if the circular economy is sometimes a marketing gimmick, its introduction has paved the way for new ways of thinking and made the industry curious to investigate new ideas. This is excellent, because it means that the industry has started to practise how to make the leap into a more prosperous future. One of these ideas that we want to investigate is an apparel and textile industry with a positive impact, both on society and on the environment. Some technologies for this already exist, such as the Newlight Air Carbon<sup>2</sup> material that makes plastic material from greenhouse gases and under the right circumstances may have a positive climate impact. A positive climate impact is not enough, we have to find ways for our value chains to contribute to land systems, freshwater supply, oceans, biodiversity and the atmosphere as well. To do this, a new approach to managing our value chains is necessary. Today’s improvement programmes typically reduce negative impact by around ten per cent, which is good, but perhaps not good enough if we want to turn the ship around, away from the iceberg, and not just rearrange the seats on the sundeck in order to have the most comfortable death.

It may seem like many of the solutions to our problems are fairytale about unicorns, but right now there is a golden opportunity to use the apparel and textile value chains to create a positive impact. Much of the manufacturing technology is there, the management systems are well thought-out and waiting to be implemented, materials for circular economies are being manufactured on a large scale and the customers are waiting. At the Swedish School of Textiles we are involved in several initiatives such as Rertextile<sup>3</sup>, From Roll to Bag<sup>4</sup> and the Sustainable Apparel Coalition<sup>5</sup>, all of which aim to achieve a significant reduction in negative sustainability impact from apparel and textile value chains. At least now we can start to practise how to make the leap into a prosperous future, where we contribute to society and the environment.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/circular-economy/overview/concept>

<sup>2</sup> <https://newlight.com/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://rertextile.se/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://fromrolltobag.eu/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://apparelcoalition.org>