

Face-to-Face with:



Lutz Walter
Secretary General
**The European Technology Platform for the Future of Textiles
and Clothing, ETP**

1. Lutz, can you please introduce yourself and the organisation that you represent?

I am the Head of the R&D, Innovation and Projects Department of EURATEX, the European Apparel and Textile Confederation based in Brussels where I started working in 1999. Since then I have been the coordinator of various European collaborative textile research and networking projects.

My additional responsibilities at EURATEX include the monitoring of EU research policies and programmes, which are of interest for the textile or clothing sector, as well as the development of strategies and position papers on the future of textile and clothing research and innovation in Europe.

Since 2004 I have been coordinating the European Technology Platform for the Future of Textiles and Clothing, the largest European textile research and innovation experts network. In 2013, the European Technology Platform became an independent legal entity and I was appointed its Secretary General.

2. Are you primarily working to improve the EU textile industry or is the research intended to help with issues that are faced globally?

The ETP's focus is Europe, especially the initiation of collaborative research projects of a strategic nature between industry and research organisations across Europe, making use of public funding opportunities provided by EU programmes. However, in practice, the spillover effects into the textile industry around the globe are large. Firstly, the research priorities targeted such as new textile materials, innovative manufacturing technologies, resource efficiency, textile solutions for new markets or new business models are as valid for other advanced textile manufacturing regions around the world. Secondly, many companies involved in European research, especially the technology providers, do business on the global markets and thereby disseminate their innovations worldwide. Some results of European textile research are first industrially adopted outside Europe such as CO₂-based textile dyeing.

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3. What do you see as the main areas of research in the coming years and why?

The Textile ETP formulated a future vision of the European textile and clothing industry which rests on 4 pillars:

- Move from commodities towards specialty products stemming from high-tech processes
- Increased use of textiles as material of choice in many sectors and application fields
- Move towards customisation, personalisation, as well as on-demand production, product-service concepts and other innovative business models
- Innovation in sustainability including resource efficiency, low environmental-impact materials and technologies and promotion of consumer health and safety in products

In its most strategic research update in 2014, we formulated concrete research priorities for each of these 4 pillars. Those research themes dealing more specifically with the sustainability theme will be presented in more detail in my presentation at the forum.

4. Is there need to have more government backing for research of this kind to ensure that the textile industry develops and provides a sustainable future for both workers and the planet?

Sustainability was often merely a 'nice-to-have' attribute in the global textile and clothing business which the market was not properly rewarding. As this situation only changes gradually, government support for research and innovation projects of companies taking risks in this field is vital and well-justified. Nevertheless many ecologically or socially responsible innovations also make great business sense with the cost savings through less waste of resources or increase in productivity of employees working in better environments. In this respect more and more companies across the global textile value chain realise that these investments have good pay-offs and are worthwhile to undertake despite an absence of government support.

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