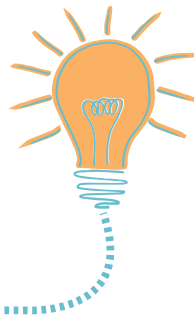


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**Case study**

## Introduction

This case study highlights young lady's journey in transforming her father's textile business into a successful circular fashion enterprise. It explores the intersection of tradition, innovation, and sustainability, showcasing the potential for a positive impact on the fashion industry and the community.

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# FROM FABRICS TO FASHION: A YOUNG WOMAN'S JOURNEY IN STARTING A CIRCULAR FASHION BUSINESS

## FROM LINEAR TO CIRCULAR BUSINESS MODEL

Sanja Lazarevska grew up in the family's apparel factory. Her father had dedicated several decades building a successful apparel manufacturing of high-quality stockings and undergarment for various clients. As she was finishing her bachelor degree in economics and business, her attention was caught by the growing concern of the fashion industry's environmental impact. The textile industry is characterized with wasteful practices and pollution, which contributed significantly to her desire to make a change. The journey began with a vision to create products to be eco-friendly, fashionable, comfortable, and affordable stockings and undergarment. Her vision lacked technical knowledge, that turned to be a key to sustainable textile production. She needed to acquire knowledge about sustainable fabrics, dyeing techniques, and ethical manufacturing processes, along with some financial aspects of running a business.

## SETTING CIRCULAR FASHION MODEL

Sanja faced numerous obstacles, including finding expertise in biodegradable materials, securing funding, and determining the applicable market entry strategy. So, being young women entrepreneur in a male-dominated industry was just one of the challenges she had to manage. She started with convincing her father, the CEO at that point, to embrace a more sustainable approach. He had concerns about the potential risks and organisational changes required to adapt the business to the circular fashion model.

*'Dad, you have to understand that in this highly competitive industry, we have to be different and build new brand on a such a basis that others are far from anticipating. Our single way to successful brand is the circular fashion model.'* – Sanja repeated in her daughter - father business conversations.

At first, she partnered with textile experts and on the parallel conducted extensive research. She enrolled in courses dedicated to sustainable fashion design and production, attended numerous workshops, and participated in seminars focused on eco-friendly textiles and circular fashion practices. Additionally, she acquired industry information and insight knowledge from experts in sustainable fashion, including designers, environmentalists, and supply chain specialists. Collaborative efforts were vital in bridging the gap and refining sustainable production process, so they were both trying to assess the needs for technical and human resources restructuring.

*"The experience was demanding, and time consuming. It was a rollercoaster of emotions - full of ups and downs - but ultimately rewarding. Every setback turned into comeback, and every challenge taught us something valuable. Now, we can proudly say that we've created a product that aligns with our values and it appealing to our customers."*

After an extensive period of knowledge acquisition, Sanja determined that her brand, April22, would concentrate on using recycled and upcycled materials, adhering to zero-waste design principles, and ensuring ethical manufacturing practices. This approach aimed to establish April22 as a leader in sus-

tainable fashion. With the unwavering support of her four lifelong friends, who were there from the inception of her idea, Sanja successfully crafted a business plan. This plan was submitted to the open call for funding from the Fund for Innovation & Technology Development. At the presentation before the board of decision makers from the funding organization, Sanja effectively conveyed her vision for April22. Her persuasive argument convinced the board of the feasibility of her idea, securing the necessary funding to begin the transition from traditional production to the manufacturing of biodegradable aloe vera products.

## NEW MARKETS

April22 experienced rapid success in attracting returning customers due to its unique selling proposition, which combined sustainability with high-quality products. The brand awareness increased through positive word-of-mouth marketing and social media promotions. It's important to mention that at this

point Sanja had gained full support from her father.

Yet, challenges arose during the pandemic, and the brand faced needs to expand the assortment. Her commitment to sustainability helped overcome some challenges and reduce textile waste, water consumption, and carbon emissions, significantly decreasing the brand's ecological footprint. It is a process that needed constant monitoring and optimization but the team enjoyed every minute. Ultimately, this took April22 in a growth phase, aiming to expand beyond the local market of Skopje, North Macedonia, off to the Western European countries.

Throughout her journey, Sanja learned several key lessons, including the importance of staying true to her core values, conducting market research over time, being proactive, determined, and listening to customer feedback. As the founder of April22, Sanja advises aspiring entrepreneurs to follow their passion, be active listener and, embrace failure as a learning opportunity.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What inspired Sanja to transform her family's textile business into a circular fashion enterprise?
2. What are the main challenges Sanja faced trying to implement sustainability and circular fashion practices in her family's business?
3. How did Sanja address the resistance to change from the older generation in her family's business?

## CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

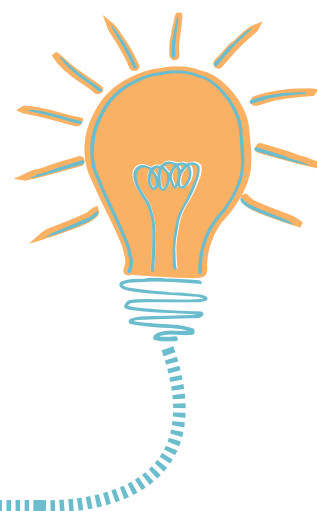
1. In what ways can other traditional businesses adapt to become more sustainable, as Sanja did with her family's textile business?
2. What are some potential drawbacks or risks associated with a circular fashion business model, and how can they be mitigated?
3. What do you think is the future of sustainability in the fashion industry, and what role can circular fashion businesses play in this future?



## EXERCISES:

1. Develop more ideas for circular fashion? Are there other industries where circular fashion business model could be applied?

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