



FASHION

Repair at the heart of sustainable fashion

Interview with...

Thami Schweichler

Co-founder and Executive President
of the United Repair Centre





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Interview conducted by Juliette Podglajen on June 10, 2025, and January 27, 2026.

The United Repair Centre is a B2B repair company for brands, creating social and environmental impact. Founded in 2022 in Amsterdam, it opened a branch in London in 2023 and a new branch in Paris will open in February 2026 at the Manufacture Berlier (13th arrondissement).

In this interview, co-founder and executive president Thami Schweichler sheds light on the role of repair in the ecological transition of fashion and the changes underway, both in terms of legislation and among brands and consumers.

What is your role at the United Repair Centre?

Thami Schweichler (TS): I am the co-founder, along with Paul Kerssens. My role is strategic development, which includes expansion, investor relations, networking, and board relations. I work primarily on fundraising. Paul manages the operational aspects, particularly technology and sales.

The idea that repair cannot be part of a profitable business model remains stubbornly entrenched in the fashion industry. How do you respond to that?

TS: First of all, it's important to emphasize one simple fact: **repair has always been a part of the life cycle of clothing – until very recently.**

The change came with the latest generations and the advent of mass production and the fast-fashion industry. The ratio between the cost of repair and the cost of purchase has completely changed: it has become cheaper to buy a new garment than to maintain the one you already have. **The central problem with this new model is that it is costing the planet.**

In my opinion, repair is the fundamental element that could lead to a new change in the fashion industry, this time towards greater sustainability. Put simply, buying clothes should be viewed in the same way as buying a car: you don't change your car because you have a flat tire.

To implement large-scale repairs, you need volume, technology, and intrinsic quality. But the first step is brand awareness. Brands need to feel that it is their responsibility to promote repairs, both from an environmental perspective and to rethink their customer journeys.

The repair market is still immature. **In 2024, 180 billion garments were produced; the United Repair Centre can make up to 1 million repairs per year.** That's just a drop in the bucket. In my opinion, large-scale repair will happen within the next fifteen years or so and will become the centre of the relationship between brands and their customers.

You work with several brands. How do they approach repair? Is it simply a way for them to show their commitment, or is it the first step in a profound transformation of their model?

TS: We currently work with more than 30 brands, including pioneers in sustainability. These brands have a long-term vision that allows us to invest in creating a large-scale repair program. This is essential because creating a repair program requires logistics, finance, marketing... The entire brand must be aligned.

In my opinion, their motivation is primarily marketing-related: **repair creates real brand value.** Then there is the financial lever, since **repairing rather than throwing away saves costs and materials.** Finally, a third motivation is external, **linked to the legislative pressure exerted on brands.**

Some brands – and even many – have no interest in repairing at the moment because their product is not ready. Whether in terms of quality or price, repair is not justified on a company-wide scale. The transition to an industry-wide scale will therefore take time.

Once you start working with a brand, is the battle won?

TS: We establish a minimum one-year contract with each brand, with the option to renew. To date, no brand has failed to renew its contract.

Each brand has its own history, couture tradition, and technology, which presents us with challenges ranging from customer experience to product complexity. The main challenge remains informing consumers about our service and convincing them to use it. Traditionally, brands encourage their customers to repurchase their products. Repair requires a change in mindset, which is often difficult for consumers to embrace, given their perception of the brand and their level of awareness of sustainability. Our challenge is therefore to communicate and offer our services in the most effective way possible.

To accelerate the transition, what is the role of each stakeholder, including the government, local authorities, brands, start-ups, and consumers?

TS: Responsibility lies first with brands, then with the national government, and finally with individual consumers.

This triangle of disruption is necessary to promote change. But consumers will not take action if brands do not give them the opportunity to do so: that is why I am convinced that responsibility lies primarily with brands. Some are pioneers and are willing to take action, but they remain rare – hence the importance of government and legislative pressure. Consumers are the last resort and must also be aware of their share of responsibility and choose their purchases accordingly.

The French anti-fast-fashion bill, which was passed by the Senate in June 2025 and must now go before the joint committee, has been welcomed. What is your opinion on this proposal? At the international level, are some states or cities more advanced than others?

TS: I consider **France to be a global pioneer in sustainable fashion**, both in terms of legislation and through organizations such as Refashion, which is an inspiring and unique model worldwide. The very strong brand/consumer relationships in France also help to reinforce brand responsibility.

Legislation in the Netherlands also supports the industry's transition. In addition, cities such as Amsterdam have been pioneers in promoting the circular economy.

It was there that the United Repair Centre was born, thanks to the Amsterdam Economic Council's launch of a dialogue on circularity in collaboration with Patagonia.

We are also seeing initiatives such as ReLondon and the criteria established by Copenhagen Fashion Week. Beyond Europe, there are similar developments in California, for example, with *extended producer responsibility*, but also in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

These initiatives are noteworthy, but we must not forget that **the challenge of the ecological transition of the fashion and textile industry is global.**

The globalised market allows for the production, transport, and resale of products that have no benefit for the planet. As long as this market lacks harmonised regulation, our efforts in terms of circularity will remain a drop in an ocean of fabric. The damage caused by imports from Shein, Temu, and other hyper-fast-fashion giants is stifling these good intentions.

A United Repair Centre in Paris in 2026

What led you to open a centre in Paris?

TS: France is a key market. The country is implementing regulations in favor of sustainable fashion and positioning itself as a pioneer with numerous initiatives. During our preliminary research, we found that certain regions of France, mainly in the south, already offer more technical repair services. **So we turned our attention to Paris, also because of the presence of major brands in the area.** When the opportunity to collaborate with Refashion and the City of Paris arose, the decision to set up shop there became obvious.

What are your priorities for the coming months?

TS: Our three priorities will be commercial success, setting up a Repair Academy in France to provide training, and developing our team and operations.

How does the United Repair Centre recruit its tailors in Paris? What does the training process look like?

TS: We recruit through the Fashion Green Hub network of tailors and other partner organizations. Candidates first take a skills test. If their skills match, they are recruited and then trained on the job. We will also develop a Repair Academy in Paris to train people with limited access to the job market.

Which partners contributed to this Parisian venture?

TS: Refashion and the City of Paris, mainly. We also benefited from the help of Business France, which provided us with the necessary network to get in touch with Fashion Green Hub. The City of Paris helped us find a location, and Refashion is providing us with support.

Did you encounter any particular difficulties in setting up in France?

TS: The main difficulties were related to understanding the French legal system and choosing the most appropriate organizational structure for our B Corp status.

Are there any initiatives underway to harmonise the global market?

TS: There are a few initiatives in Geneva aimed primarily at defining what fast fashion, textiles, waste, and second-hand goods are. **Having common definitions for these concepts would already be a significant step forward.**

How do regulatory changes in different regions affect the United Repair Centre's development strategy?

TS: Our strategy depends entirely on these developments, as they create favorable conditions for our expansion.

But the challenge for us is also to work with brands to increase B2B repairs and reach the tipping point that will make repairs the new focus of the industry.

You mentioned the United Repair Centre's use of technology. How does that work in practice?

TS: Technology is, in a way, our only differentiating factor compared to the repairer you might find around the corner. It gives us access to the brands' end consumers, connects them to our service, and thus provides an unforgettable customer experience.

Today, most brands have lost direct contact with their customers and don't know who bought the garment, where, or under what conditions. Repairing allows us to reconnect and understand how the garment ages and wears out. Our platform allows us to collect this data and use it to develop services for brands.

How would the data collected on repairs be useful to brands?

TS: Our data analyses are useful on three levels.

The first is the **“product”** level. How many products have been repaired? What was the repair? This helps with development because knowing more about the weak points of each product makes it possible to improve its quality and, ultimately, its repairability.

The second is **impact**: we measure the environmental benefit by quantifying the tons of CO₂ equivalent and textile waste avoided.

The third level is perhaps the most interesting: it's the **added value in terms of marketing**. Does repairing products help build customer loyalty? We therefore use data to prove that repairing adds financial value.

Are you testing this with certain brands?

TS: We are discussing it with several brands, but the process is still ongoing. This idea is, in a way, the counterpart to the digital product passport currently being developed at the European level, which will be implemented in 2027.

What obstacles could slow down the transition of the fashion industry and your own development strategy?

TS: The biggest threat is at the international level: the uncertainty weighing on players due to the macroeconomic context, particularly with the Trump administration's aggressive foreign policy. Many of the brands we work with tell us about their lack of visibility.

A second threat is at the state level: **if legislation is slow to evolve, the entire transformation of the sector will be delayed.**

A third threat is internal to our own model. We are asking brands that have never repaired anything to set up a repair program. We need to strike a delicate balance: not moving too fast, but not too slowly either. We must work hand in hand with brands to set a pace that allows us to develop our business without compromising its sustainability.

What about the workforce?

TS: It's a broader issue that goes beyond the fashion and textile sector. The ecological transition requires an evolution in skills, such as for the electrification of cars, or a return to certain skills that have almost disappeared, such as clothing repair. Some of these skills and know-how are not currently valued: education has a fundamental role to play in changing perceptions.

To find workers, we created the Repair Academy. Today, 30% of our workforce comes from there.



Paris-Île de France Capitale Économique (PCE) is the innovation lab for the attractiveness of Greater Paris. Founded in 1991 by the Paris Île-de-France Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) alongside around thirty major French companies and supported by the Greater Paris Metropolis, PCE analyzes the trends and factors shaping today's and tomorrow's most attractive cities. PCE identifies key challenges and proposes concrete solutions to help Greater Paris and its stakeholders anticipate major transitions and assert their leadership on the global stage.

PCE carries out three core missions:

- Prospective monitoring and international benchmarking on the key factors driving the attractiveness of global cities.
- Organizing working groups led by economic actors to develop actionable strategies and implement pilot projects within Greater Paris.
- Showcasing the expertise of our Grand Paris Makers®, by hosting conferences and seminars, welcoming international delegations, and organizing learning expeditions.

Editor

Paris-Île de France Capitale Économique
2 place de la Bourse - 75002 Paris
contact@pce-idf.org

Managing director

Chloë Voisin-Bormuth

Redactor

Juliette Podglajen

Communication

Louise Limare

Louise Tirvaudey