MODEM Dialogues - In conversation with Scott Lipinski

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Scott Lipinski, CEO Fashion Council Germany
Portrait Scott Lipinski - Photo Credit ® Nela Koenig
Questions conceived and hosted by Florian Müller

MODEM:
In your role leading Fashion Council Germany, you move between politics, the market and creativity. When do these different forces come together in a way that feels truly meaningful?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
It feels truly meaningful when these forces align around shared values: sustainability, cultural identity, freedom, and innovation. We see this when policymakers invest in young talent, the market responds with genuine interest, and creatives are free to push boundaries. In those moments, we're not just supporting designers, we're shaping the future of fashion. Events like Berlin Fashion Week, our delegation trips, or the publication of key studies create space for these forces to meet in dialogue, collaboration, and shared progress. That’s when transformation becomes possible, not through one sector alone, but through collective momentum.

MODEM:
Institutions often demand pragmatism, yet vision remains essential. How do you keep sight of long-term goals without losing yourself in the rhythm of the everyday?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
We try to maintain a dual focus: paying close attention to detail while never losing sight of our purpose. Regular reflections, strategic check-ins and active listening help us to recalibrate and understand the need of those at different stages of the industry. As a council, we benefit from having guiding voices that are part of the industry in different fields, including press, retail, consulting and more. While long-term impact is our guiding principle, we have learned that lasting change often occurs through consistent, pragmatic steps.

MODEM:
As Berlin Fashion Week grows more international and Fashion Council Germany expands its work abroad, what remains or transforms in your sense of what German fashion could be?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
What remains is the strength of the concept: a deep commitment to sustainability, quality, and values-driven work. These roots are still visible, but they're evolving. German fashion is transforming from being seen as pragmatic or industrial into a space for cultural expression and progressive thought. That's something we often hear from international guests at Berlin Fashion Week.
What's new is the emotional depth, the openness to experimentation, and the confidence to bring these ideas into global dialogue. Abroad, we're increasingly recognized for our values. At home, we're still learning to value our own vision more boldly.

MODEM:
Support is something you often describe as more than financial aid. What kind of structures, in your experience, help create lasting and meaningful change?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
Trust-based ecosystems. Structures that encourage mentorship, creative freedom, and long-term collaboration, rather than short-term funding cycles, create space for real growth. Designers need platforms where they can experiment, fail, and re-emerge, supported by networks rather than forced into competition. That's how cultural capital is built.

We see it in the communities that the designers themselves are building, where shared knowledge, mutual support, and authentic connections foster resilience and innovation. It is our goal to create these ecosystems not only within one community but across the entire fashion industry. Through our educational programs, we aim to bring in new voices early on - creating awareness before traditional career paths begin. Change becomes lasting when structures support not just those already inside the system, but also those preparing to reshape it.

MODEM:
You accompany many transformation processes. How do you sense when change is genuinely rooted and when it remains only at the surface?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
Rooted change alters not just presentations, but also language, behaviour and structures. You can sense this when decisions are made differently, when inclusion is embedded rather than performed, and when difficult conversations are had, rather than avoided. In contrast, surface-level change often disappears when the spotlight shifts.

MODEM:
Expectations in this field can be loud and conflicting. What helps you find clarity when decisions must be made?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
We find clarity by returning to our core values. We ask: Does this serve the mission? Does it uplift the right voices? Will it still matter in six months, or six years? Dialogue is essential. Listening deeply, especially to dissenting views, often reveals more than consensus ever could. Conflicts do happen, for example, around participation in Berlin Fashion Week or delegation trips, when expectations aren't fully met. In those moments, we come back to integrity. Sometimes, clarity means making tough calls, like protecting brands from ambitious visions they're not yet ready for. We choose long-term alignment over short-term approval.

MODEM:
Instead of roles or strategies, which inner beliefs shape the way you engage with leadership in fashion?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
We believe in service over status. Leadership means listening, amplifying others, and holding space for complexity. I also deeply believe in cultural responsibility: fashion is never just about aesthetics but about shaping society. Leading means navigating both care and courage. We are not a consulting agency but are always trying to lead our members and stakeholders into meaningful collaboration and lasting impact.

MODEM:
The Mental Health in Fashion campaign highlights how structural conditions shape personal wellbeing. Where do you see the industry's responsibility to rethink systems and ways of working?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
Everywhere - from education to employment. We must advocate for humane schedules, psychological safety, and fair pay, especially for emerging and marginalized creatives. If fashion claims to reflect society, it must also reflect its healing.

MODEM:
Fashion is often called a cultural heritage, yet words alone rarely bring change. What would need to shift for this idea to become a lived part of the industry?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
We need to institutionalize cultural memory: support archiving, invest in fashion scholarship, and protect independent voices. Treating fashion as heritage means valuing narrative over novelty and craft over commerce. It also means incorporating diverse histories - not just the dominant ones - into our narratives.

MODEM:
Looking back at recent years, what do you feel is worth preserving and what needs to change at its core?

SCOTT LIPINSKI:
We must preserve the sense of community and resilience that has emerged, particularly among independent designers. What needs to change is the short-term thinking that still defines much

of the industry. Fashion must evolve from a reactive, seasonal cycle into a reflective cultural force.