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Fashion Design Education and Sustainability. A challenge accepted.

ABSTRACT

Fashion is one of the most relevant phenomena to describe contemporary cultures and societies (Fiorani, 2006; Bertola, 2018).

Despite this, fashion has always been a marginal topic within the design scientific debate. Fashion design education has been a small niche within the whole academic system. Nowadays, this exile, that could be considered both forced or voluntary, is ending. Fashion is strong of its recognized impact on global economies, society, culture, and is conscious of the need for it to engage, as for all other sectors, in guiding a coherent transition of the surrounding world towards a more sustainable paradigm.

In view of this, this exploratory paper, developed within the scope of the author's doctoral research, present an initial analysis of the current state of the art in practices across Europe, mapping existing and emerging practices within university level institution and industry, to identify approaches and practices that could be amplified, and implemented to contribute to a sustainable paradigm for fashion design education.

1. Context

Fashion Design for Sustainability challenging Fashion Design Education.

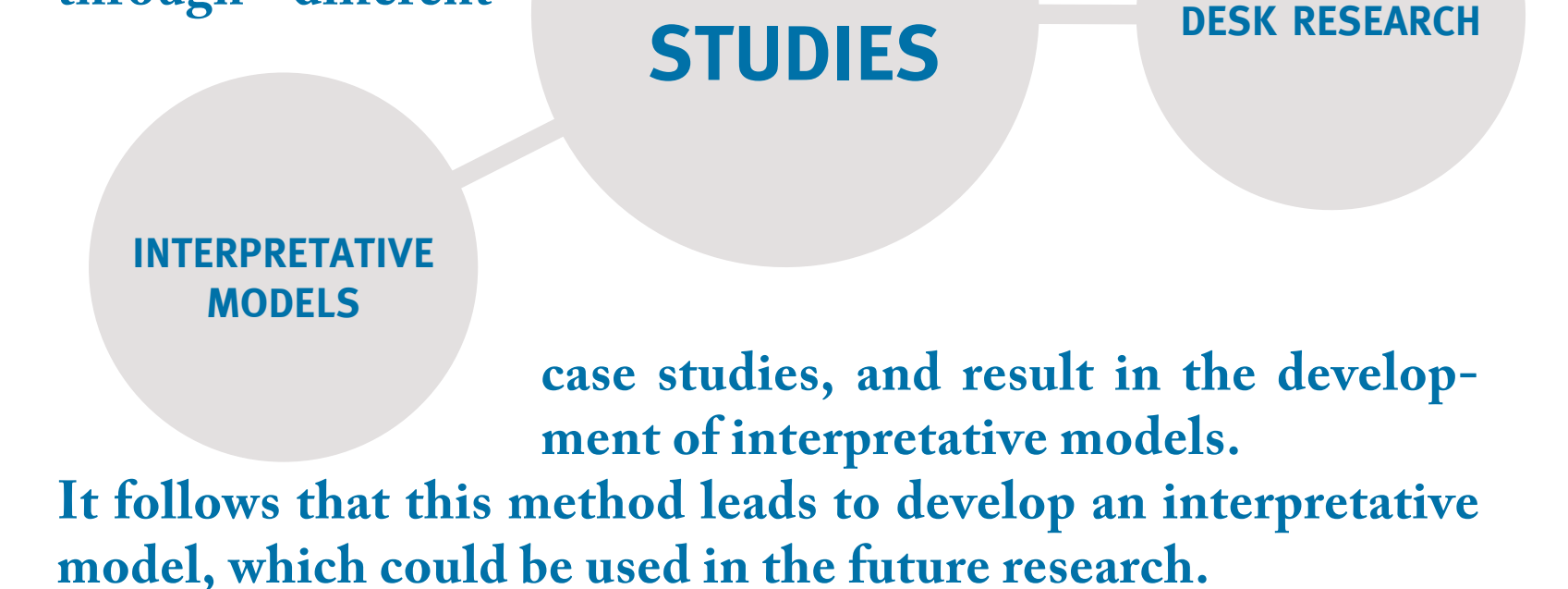


The aim of this paper is providing, trough an embryonic research, some opportunity to think about the fashion design education transition and how it will be possible integrate sustainability in the fashion design schools.

2. Methodology

The research applied the case study method to support the idea that the fashion education institution should evolve according with its context and adopt a new framework which should integrate the principles and practices of the fashion design for sustainability. According to Yin, to collect data in developing case studies, the research integrated multiple methods, which include desk research – looking at company reports and government publications – and field research – semi-structured interviews and observations. The case study was the selected method for different tactical reasons. First of all, case study method using primary data is suitable in a situation where the existing knowledge base is limited to examine proposing questions.

Secondly, as said by Eisenhardt and Graebner, case study method best gives back the rich, real-world context in which the phenomenon occurs, that is otherwise difficult to evaluate using other methods such as surveys. Lastly, as stated by Nixon and Blakley, the use of the case study method allows to declare specific assertions that are supported by the experiential knowledge that prevent from generalization, based on an individual case, but through different



3. Case study

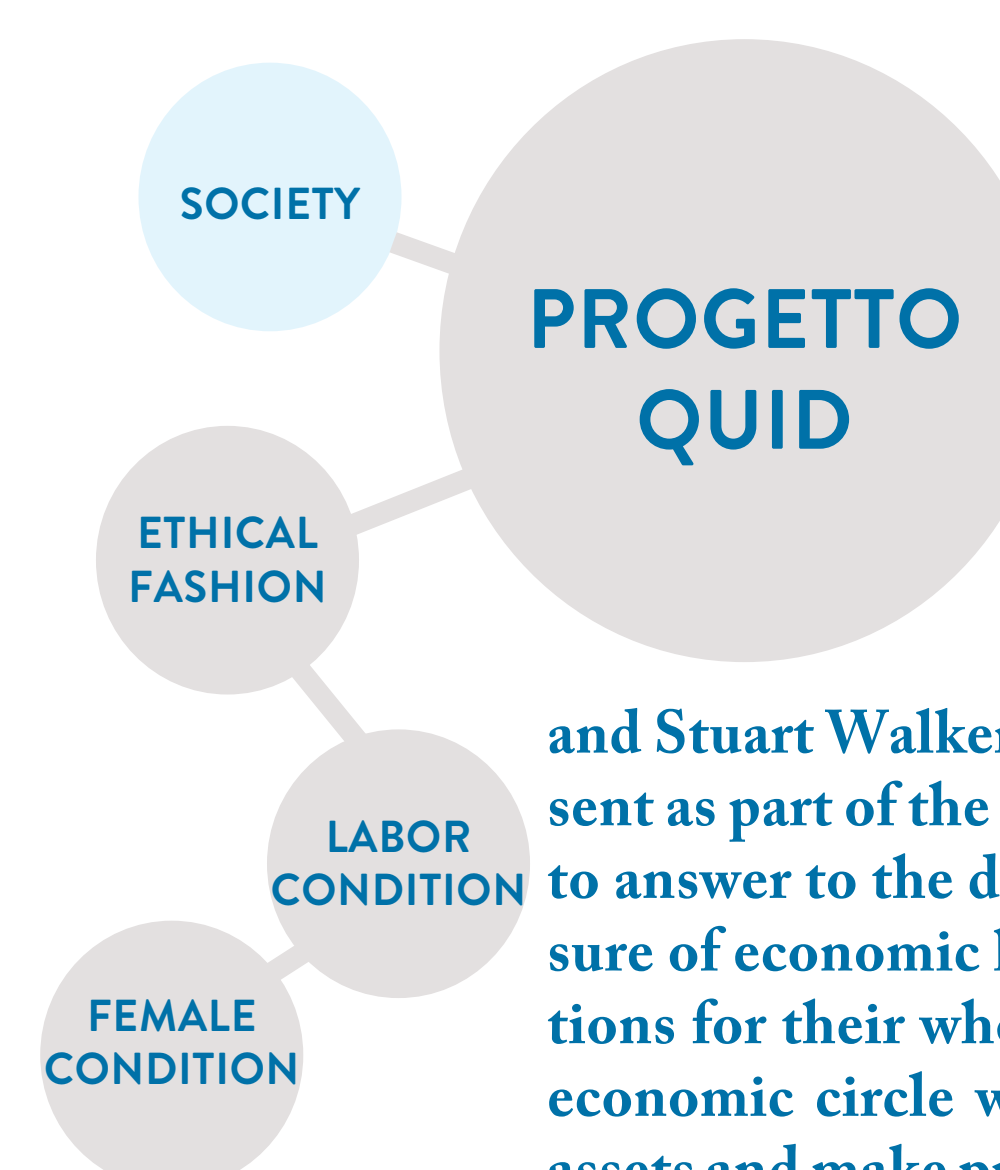
The research then examined the most appropriate cases, within the presented cultural model, where design education should be oriented towards growing professionals who are able to guide fashion into a new paradigm, centered on principles harmonized with the collective aim of pursuing a sustainable development, on a social, cultural, and economic point of view. Milano Fashion Institute and Progetto Quid have been identified as the most suitable cases for this study among fourteen European cases within institutions and companies.



Milano Fashion Institute (MFI) is an interuniversity consortium for the higher education in the fashion industry founded in 2007 by three Milan universities: Bocconi University, Cattolica University and Politecnico di Milano. Today, sustainability is rethinking the structure of the fashion industry. It is necessary working on responsible innovation, starting the integration of ethics and aesthetics into the value chain. Nowadays, industries need to redesign their business model in favour of a new sustainable one,

answering the needs of the future generations. The short course "New Sustainable Fashion" (NSF) aims to train graduate and graduating students, young managers, professionals and young entrepreneurs to face the complexity of the fashion industry by providing tools and sharing business practices. It provides the participants information and examples on innovative business models in fashion & luxury. "The course focuses on the driver of sustainability for the creation of shared value. Creating shared value in fashion

means being able to answer the needs of many stakeholders: the environment, society, institutions, art, culture, territory and the consumers. As responsible fashion company have already started the long and complex journey of integrating ethics and aesthetics into the value chain, in constant balance with all the stakeholders"1. During the lectures, class discussions and company visits NSF explores: circular economy, recycling, upcycling, prosumer-creation, open-source, crowdfunding, wearable-technologies, online-offline integration, transmedia-storytelling, B-corporations and open-innovation among others.



Progetto Quid is an Italian fashion brand which employs women from vulnerable social groups in the production of clothes and accessories. Their products are made from high quality textiles donated by some of Italy's top fashion firms. It is been selected to be studied for its commitment in the economic and social sustainability field that provides an opportunity to advance new understandings about the research inquiry. Their vision of design as a mode of social, economic, cultural and environmental change, can be related to an extensive tradition of design, with scholars such as Victor Papanek, Nigel Cross, Ivan Illich

and Stuart Walker drawing attention to design as 'a process of re-consideration of the present as part of the creation of shared futures.' As a sustainable economic reality, it was able to answer to the dominant discourse of SDG - Sustainable Development Goals as a measure of economic health. Their practices are designed to guarantee decent working conditions for their whole working force to avoid disparity. The purpose is to create a virtuous economic circle with a fair access to financial services to manage incomes, accumulate assets and make productive investments. As a sustainable social reality, they developed the ability of their community to interact and collaborate in ways that create and exemplify a flourishing social cohesion. As for all the aspects of sustainability, they refer their work to present and long-term futures, as social sustainability considers places, communities and organisations, formal and informal.

4. Limitations & Considerations

1 Fashion design education is successfully incorporating multidisciplinary research questions and problems coming from the real world, interacting in a dynamic balance with external players, such as companies.

2 Fashion design education is finally obtaining the credit for its role in leading all the sectors trough an innovation of meaning that is intrinsic in its DNA, within process of enhancing cultural heritage

3 Fashion design education is already transforming in some advanced institutions, and it can be described as a process of transition towards an innovative and transdisciplinary environment.



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