

FASHION DESIGN AS A DISCIPLINE IN ONSITE AND ONLINE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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1. FASHION DESIGN HIGHER EDUCATION IN CONTEXT

The fashion design sector is part of a complex, global system, formed by multinational teams of professionals with aesthetic and practical capabilities who learn, and exchange experiences when developing new projects. In order to keep up with new knowledge and information, fashion designers, brands, companies, consumers are increasingly seeking and disseminating information through technologically integrated markets, despite time or space constraints. The learning experience in fashion design requires a diversified range of disciplines that balance creativity with managerial competences, innovation, and understanding of production and distribution processes, consumer behavior and market reality. From the subjects that compose a fashion design curriculum, this paper focuses on on-site and online programs to understand the approaches on ‘fashion design’, as the learning subject aimed to develop students design capabilities in the practice of developing innovative fashion products. So, what kind of learning ‘design for fashion’ has been offered in on-site and online higher education environments?

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study resorted to online and on-site fashion programmes identified in broader research about fashion design higher education in Europe. The analysis focused on the overall presence of ‘fashion design’ in the curriculum, its content and specified ECTs (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), as well as its learning outcomes (LO) and resorted to a set of fashion design learning principles (FDLP) that were also defined in previous studies [1, 2]. Seven courses were selected to further examination, from the criteria applied: Level 6 of the Qualification Framework, (QF-HEA), provided by Higher Education Institutions (HEI), within the EHEA (European Higher Education Area). Besides that, only courses that provided full access to their curriculum and/or syllabus were chosen. Only courses taught in English were selected, and professional or academic ranks were also consulted to help with the final sample. Lastly, European fashion councils and promotion associations were consulted in order to understand their vision and expectations about fashion design as a profession.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fashion Design is present as a discipline in the three years of the BA Visual Arts, Fashion at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts [3]. Its LO encompasses capabilities required to develop a fashion product or collection, from identifying the sources and materials to the creative interpretation and transformation techniques and processes, further development through design principles and the final presentation of concepts and designs. BFA Fashion Design at the Borås University [4], associates designing of fashion with the design theory and practice. Learning about fashion product development is expressed progressively by Design Project disciplines, offered through the three years of the course, and by the Degree Project. The

curriculum LO is supported by six principles (Design, Design Methodology, Design Discourse, Design aesthetics, Design ethics, Materials, and techniques). The BAHons Fashion at University of Edinburgh [5], clearly presents fashion as a discipline, (Fashion Design 1a, 1b, and Fashion 1a and 1b) in the first year, focusing on the fundamentals of project development and garment production. In the third and fourth years, Design Externality 3 Major, Design Studio and Design Research (Fashion), represent fashion design as project-oriented disciplines. Students can build a flexible curriculum, choosing among optional courses and or internship and projects. Fashion design is not stated as a discipline in BAHons Fashion at Ravensbourne University [6]. While the first year contextualizes fashion sector and its productive models, the second-year focus on disciplines like Industry Brief Denim Innovation or Industry Brief Contemporary Innovation, since the designing of fashion products links with the fashion business, market, and industry. In the third year, Major Project Concept Research & Prototyping presents two pathways: Industry Innovation or Ready to Wear. The curriculum is grounded in design thinking theory, leading projects to present innovative and creative solutions in collaboration with companies, more according to designers' professional life. The course LO is grounded by the principles of the Mindsets and Skillsets Manifesto adopted by Ravensbourne University. BAHons Fashion Design curriculum at the University of Leeds [7], does not present fashion design as a discipline, but industry-led projects for fashion product development, which are the centre subject of the disciplines: Design Development and Portfolio in the second year, and Fashion Innovation Research and Analysis (Negotiated Project) in the third year. In the second and third years, other core disciplines on research and methodology, market and innovation. Finally, the online courses analyzed present a very limited or no association with fashion design as a discipline. Design and Fashion Discipline course at Università Telemática E-Campus [8], presents a title that carries fashion as a discipline, but ironically the curriculum combines socio-cultural disciplines with arts (theatre, cinema, ...), economics, law, and linguistics, under which fashion (drawing, industrial design) is an applied subject. *Disegno Industriale 1* (Industrial Design 1) and *Disegno Industriale 2* (Industrial Design 2), focus on the development of 'technical sports accessory', a mountain backpack in the second year and an 'eyewear for sport', in the third year.

Similarly, the course Architecture and Industrial Design, Fashion pathway at Università Telemática San Raffaele Roma [9], does not present fashion design as a discipline. Concept Design is indicated in the first year, focused on design movements and aesthetics. Fashion Design Lab 2 (syllabus available only in the second year) covers from fashion history, communication, drawing, trends, and modeling.

European fashion councils and promotion associations perspectives were consulted, since they create a bridge between the academy and the industry, and many of them work together with universities and schools to promote and guide fashion start-ups. Combine creativity, technology, and sustainability with business is the main concerns of these associations. Three courses stood out: BAHons Fashion at Ravensbourne University present a curriculum that aligns with the fashion market and industry. Although adopting an aesthetic, interpretative, creative and innovative perspective on fashion design, BFA Fashion Design at the Borås University also foresees fashion's economic, industrial and market-related aspects. Students of the BAHons Fashion Design at the University of Leeds may choose elective subjects from different faculties, including business and enterprise modules run by Leeds University Business School, which represents a significant opportunity to establish alignment with the perspectives identified by the European fashion councils and promotion associations.

Less business/industry oriented is BA Visual Arts, at Fashion at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts curriculum since it focuses on innovation and creativity, on the designer's personality, and experimentation capability. Likewise, the University of Edinburgh BAHons Fashion

curriculum is less aligned with the business perspective adopted by the European fashion councils and promotion associations, since it is focused on personal design projects.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to understand how ‘fashion design’, as a discipline, was offered by on-site and online courses and programmes, in order to contribute to new perspectives and pathways for the fashion design higher education, especially in online contexts. The complexity of the fashion sector could be identified by the different faculties or departments under which fashion courses are organized, by the varied workload and denomination adopted, depending on the programme perspective. It shapes the learning in fashion either as a design project as artistic experimentation, or even social sciences in practice. Fashion, as a discipline, was found combined with other business or market-oriented disciplines, but the responsive strategy adopted by the higher education sector indicates that the acquired knowledge will be outdated by the time designers reach the job market. This study highlighted that online courses are either a mere transposition of an old idea of fashion or represent the absence of fashion as a business. It seems that online courses are misaligned with the needs of heterogeneous professional groups, the actual and future market requirements and the industry research, despite having the opportunity to resort to disruptive digital technologies and offer student-centered, flexible, and prospective learning.

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