

Paradigms of Sustainability: Roles and Impact of Communication in the Fashion System

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Abstract : As central for human and social development of the future, sustainability is becoming a recurring theme also in the fashion industry, where the need to explore new possible directions aimed at achieving sustainability goals and their communication is rising. Scholars have been devoted to the overall environmental impact of the textile and fashion industry, which, emerging as one of the world's most polluting, today concretely assumes the need to take the path of sustainability in both products and production processes. Every day we witness the impact of our consumption, showing that the sustainability concept is as vast as complex: with a sometimes ambiguous definition, sustainability can concern projects, products, companies, sales, packagings, supply chains in relation to the actors proximity as well as traceability, raw materials procurement, and disposal. However, in its primary meaning, sustainability is the ability to maintain specific values and resources for future generations. The contribution aims to address sustainability in the fashion system as a layered problem that requires substantial changes at different levels: in the fashion product (materials, production processes, timing, distribution, and disposal), in the functioning of the system (life cycle, impact, needs, communication) and last but not least in the practice of fashion design which should conceive durable, low obsolescence and possibly demountable products. Moreover, consumers play a central role for the growing awareness, together with an increasingly strong sensitivity towards the environment and sustainable clothing. Since it is also a market demand, undertaking significant efforts to achieve total transparency and sustainability in all production and distribution processes is becoming fundamental for the fashion system. Sustainability is not to be understood as purely environmental but as the pursuit of collective well-being in relation to conscious production, human rights, and social dignity with the aim to achieve intelligent, resource, and environmentally friendly production and consumption patterns. Assuming sustainability as a layered problem makes the role of communication crucial to convey scientific or production specific content so that people can obtain and interpret information to make related decisions. Hence, if it is true that "what designers make becomes the future we inhabit", design is facing great and challenging responsibility. The fashion industry needs a system of rules able to assess the sustainability of products, which is transparent and easily interpreted by consumers, identifying and enhancing virtuous practices. There are still complex and fragmented value chains that make it extremely difficult for brands and manufacturers to know the history of their products, to identify exactly where the risks lie, and to respond to the growing demand from consumers and civil society for responsible and sustainable production practices in the fashion industry.

Keywords : fashion design, fashion system, sustainability, communication, complexity

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