

This book provides an interdisciplinary perspective to consider 'fashion capital' as a point of connection between culture and commerce. It brings together contributors from the UK, North America, Australia and Europe to examine how fashion is produced, consumed and mediated. In devoting critical attention to the concept of 'fashion capital', this book considers significant areas of research in fashion studies, including fashion branding and value creation, fashion cities and sites of cultural production and formations of personal, national and transnational fashion identities.

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FASHION CAPITAL: STYLE ECONOMIES, SITES AND CULTURES

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'Fashionalisation': Why So Many Cities Host Fashion Weeks

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Abstract

The 'fashion week' is traditionally an industry-led event, exclusive to trade professionals and usually named after the host city. It is an avenue for fashion designers and couture houses to showcase their seasonal collections giving precedence to agents and buyers to determine appropriate purchases. The biannual schedule also allows time for retailers to arrange their order and incorporate the designers into their retail marketing. The most prominent biannual fashion weeks are held in Paris, Milan, New York and London. In the past decade, a handful of smaller fashion weeks have filled the international calendar. The Moscow Fashion Week is now the largest fashion event in Eastern Europe and the *Imam Khomeini* Mosque in Tehran staged Iran's first Islamic Fashion Week in July 2006. Today, there are no less than 85 cities from around the world play host to at least one fashion week.¹ The questions that arise are; why have so many cities decided to hold a fashion week? What is promoted in these new-rise fashion weeks and what is the relation to the local and traditional industries? This chapter focuses on the objectives of the 'new-rise' Fashion Weeks and their rationale behind hosting the event. It discusses how fashion is used to achieve varied objectives beyond serving the fashion industry and considers the many conflicting roles that it plays in a city – from endeavouring to brand a city as a 'fashion city' to merely using its associated events to generate tourism. It highlights the embedded tangible and intangible assets in fashion and how they have been employed to serve institutional objectives.

Key Words: Fashion, fashion week, creative industry, cultural economy, cultural production, city branding, urban development.

1. Competition between Cities

New models of development have focused attention on the economic system of countries, which are based on the post-industrial economy. The source of economic value and wealth is no longer the production of material goods but the creation and manipulation of dematerialised content. Today, culture is recognised as essential to generating economic value. Recognising the worth of tangible and intangible cultural assets, public authorities have started to adopt new planning models. In these new models, a relationship between economy, society and territory has been identified: in different research fields this relationship configures itself as a complex system able to generate growth and development.² It is obvious that the dimension of competitiveness increasingly shifts from the micro-level of single

economic operators to the macro-level of territorial systems. Within these systems, the organisation of resources and cooperative networks fed by high levels of social capital has become a necessary requirement for productivity and territorial growth. This has resulted in increasing capacity of external resources.³ Some of them are seen in the investment of cultural industries where tangible and intangible assets are excessively drawn for economic and territory growth.

Furthermore, the forms and dynamics of Western capitalism have facilitated the transformation of metropolitan cities,⁴ challenging the dominant world capitals.⁵ This has called into question the significance of certain world-class cities and their influence. As Jess Berry points out in her chapter in this volume, in the hierarchy of fashion cities, emergent fashion cities such as Shanghai, Moscow and Jaipur, have destabilised the status of the traditional fashion capitals – Paris, London, New York, Milan and Tokyo via new technologies, the rise of a new middle class and the evolvement of consumer markets. Resulting in such a rubric is not only the decentralisation and democratisation of fashion across global networks, but also competition between cities,⁶ which has become increasingly severe. One aspect of such competition is to foster a positive image on the global stage through investment in cultural industries.⁷ The blatant competition between urban localities has given rise to a proliferation of museums and landmark buildings, sponsored cultural centres and the staging of international festivals.⁸ These cultural strategies, of which fashion plays a part, are often used to brand a city⁹ rather than maintain its heritage and indigenous culture,¹⁰ or to evolve its cultural assets in a new form of cultural production. Art biennales, international film and music festivals in cities that have not previously been associated with art and culture are cases in point. Hosting a fashion week is a new addition to these strategies. In the past decade, a handful of smaller fashion weeks have been mushrooming and today there are no less than 85 cities from around the world that hold at least one fashion week.¹¹

The popularity of hosting fashion week in many post-industrial cities is not without reason – for to associate a city with fashion increases its competitiveness. The idea of the fashion city, as Gilbert¹² notes, has become part of a broader strategy of metropolitan 'boosterism' featured by global competition between cities. The production of cultural representations and city images from it fostered an engine whose function is to brand a city.¹³ The heritage and indigenous culture of a locality has, in many cases, not been incorporated¹⁴ which results in the disintegration of the marketed and actual city image. This form of fashion branding partly explains why many cities, such as Bangkok, Amsterdam, and Sydney that have not previously been associated with fashion, have begun to host fashion weeks.

2. Global Partnership in Fashion Week

The origins of fashion shows and seasonal collections are believed to lie in Paris with the establishment of *La Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* in

1910. Changing consumption patterns and the rising demand for clothes after WWII saw other fashion cities joining force with the seasonal Paris Fashion Week. Florence organised its first fashion week in 1951, with the London Fashion Week launching in 1958. The Council of Fashion Designers of America was founded in New York in 1963 to protect and promote local designs.¹⁵ Hong Kong who held the first Asian fashion week launched theirs in 1967. Over the decades, these Euro-American cities have become dominant fashion capitals with the association of the most prominent fashion weeks in Paris, Milan, New York, and London.

Despite the fact that a fashion week traditionally serves buyers and press a chance to preview fashion designs in a seasonal basis, many new-rise fashion weeks are annual events. Tunis Fashion Week, for instance, is a biannual event and Edinburgh Fashion Week is even held in April to avoid clashes with the international fashion-week calendar. For many cities, hosting fashion week in the changing seasons is not essential as long as it is on the international-event calendar. Hosting a fashion week becomes a gesture in partnership with global players. As the aim of British Columbia Fashion Week (2005) reads, 'to establish Vancouver as an emerging fashion centre and a true partner in the global fashion world along with Milan, Paris, London, New York, Toronto, Hong Kong and Sydney.'¹⁶ For some cities, global partnership and matching competition appear to be the determining factors when hosting a fashion week.

3. (Re)Branding the city

Organising a fashion week is commonly understood as a way to promote a fashion centre. However, many new-rise fashion weeks are more interested to promote their host cities than to fostering them as a fashion centre. The fact that city branding is instrumental to city rejuvenation has led fashion week to become part of a city's branding tools. The embedded immaterial properties of fashion like modernity and capitalism help to revive the façade of a city that strikes out on global competition. When a city is in need of a makeover, fashion is taken to restore its vitality as seen in Edinburgh. To refresh its age-old image, it is hoped that the establishment of Harvey Nicolas department store together with the fashion week will revamp the city to one that is trendy and modern. This re-branding was also central to Beijing's first fashion week. In 2002, it was staged in Tian'anmen Square, the political heart of Beijing and cultural symbol of China, according to *China People Daily* the fashion week was held to 'give more flavour to the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.' While the country assigns Shanghai the role of the cultural capital, the Beijing fashion week has been made distinctive and differentiated from that of Shanghai. Hence, Beijing Fashion Week held hands with the capital's biggest PR event to manifest a modern China to the global stage. In Jakarta, fashion week, according to its official statement, is used to 'bring the rich of Indonesian colours and styles to influence, seduce, and colour the global market.'¹⁷ It is unclear as to why and how Indonesian colours would seduce the

global market when today's fashion is increasingly internationalised if not transnationalised. Such a statement addresses neither the Indonesian fashion industry nor its market, which is believed to be the key elements for a fashion week. Rather it hints at the importance of being a global player and its external recognition. Global recognition is central to these cities' image-making programme, not only to Jakarta but also Kuala Lumpur as the organisers announced the desire for its 2005 fashion week to be 'listed on the international events calendar.'¹⁸

Nonetheless, it appears that fashion designers and fashion presentation are not central to the agenda of some fashion weeks and in some cases, they are totally missing. As seen with some new players, the fashion week is a promotional engine for the event itself and the event is promoted as an entertainment. While many of the new-rise fashion weeks are open to the public, the event has become a form of show-business – aimed at publicity rather promoting fashion products. For example, the website of Singapore's 2005 Fashion Week did not include a show schedule, designers' information or catwalk photos: only a list of VIPs essential to generate press coverage:

Famous faces coming to town include: British supermodel Lily Cole is the face of the Festival, Ms Angelica Visconti (granddaughter of the late Salvatore Ferragamo) and Mr Salvatore Ferragamo from the famous Ferragamo family, New York shoe designer Beverly Feldman, Korean celebrities, Ms Kim So Yeon and Mr Kim Sung Min. Regional supermodels from China, Ms Lu Yan and Ms Chun Xiao.¹⁹

Celebrities were invited to grace the event, which aimed to promote itself for public interest rather than as a response to its fashion industry.

Even when designer labels were showcased, seldom were there home grown designs. Instead of promoting local talents, the 2005 Shanghai Fashion Week Expo's²⁰ website gave prominence to the participating European designers, like Karl Lagerfeld, Basso & Brooke, and Malene Birger, so as to generate publicity for the event. Features of these designers' collections dominated the press, which pushed aside local designers whose collections received limited attention and press coverage. Although some fashion weeks like that of Nairobi in 2004 aimed to develop Kenya's fashion sector by promoting works of local designers, a leading Indian fashion label, Satya Paul, was the focus of the event. Many local designers could not help questioning how the presence of an Indian label could help to promote local fashion. The 2004 Kenya Fashion Week failed to attract buyers and the event was criticised as having audiences 'who c[a]me not to buy but just for entertainment.'²¹ Some fashion weeks even made the idea of entertainment prominent in their event. The 2005 Jakarta Fashion Week for example, described

itself as 'part of global fashion series' and celebrated the inclusion of the 'party scene' in their event.

4. Driving Economy and Tourism

As observed by Donna Reamy and Deidra Arrington in their chapter featured in this volume, the fashion week brings economic growth to not only the host cities but also the world economy. Given that fashion week generates publicity, most cities proclaim its essence as 're-branding' the city. Part of this re-branding exercise is to generate tourism. Organising fashion week has proven to attract tourists. This is particularly evident with New Zealand Fashion Week in Auckland. The 2004 event 'generated 33 million New Zealand dollars, or US\$21.6 million, for the New Zealand economy in terms of total output, an estimated 30 million dollars for Auckland, and millions more in incremental foreign exchange earnings for designers.'²² These figures and the generation of associated employment out of Auckland fashion week directly contributed to the country's economy. The fact that some fashion weeks, like that of Kuala Lumpur, are supported by the Tourism Ministry²³ reveals the importance of fashion week to a country's tourism. In this particular instance, tourism was already the second-largest contributor to the country's revenue after manufacturing. Similarly with tourist revenue in mind, Iceland famously set its 2006 fashion week in unusual open-air locations at the unconventional time of 1a.m. July's endless summer sunlight was promoted as a prime attraction to the fashion week tourist.²⁴ To these cities, the revenue generated from tourism paid off the investment in hosting a fashion week. While Paris haute couture fashion week is part of the PR investment of luxury brands, (given the presence of thousands of international journalists and therefore global press coverage), new-rise fashion weeks have mostly proved to be part of the PR investment of promoting tourism in host cities. Despite insufficiency of haute couture clients to feed the market, the former strikes to perform for the same industry; the latter, however, diverges from that to service another industry. Hosting fashion week no longer needs to be orientated to the fashion industry.

Above all, the fashion week is undeniably a huge revenue generator in economical terms. It creates wealth, generates employment and earnings for different service providers. In some countries like Thailand, it preserves traditional crafts that benefit directly the local economy. The 2005 Port-of-Spain Fashion Week was also internally focussed aiming to promote young and upcoming designers to buyers from the local community. This was in line with the Trinidad and Tobago's government effort to widen the economy, which is primarily energy-based. In Pakistan the development of the country's fashion supply chain was hoped to provide new opportunities for Pakistan's fashion industry and employment for a large number of youth. Pakistan's 2005 Fashion Week partly satisfied this idea. Thus, as these examples illustrate the fashion week has turned into a resource for economic drive serving both institutional and national agenda.

5. Providing a Sense of Belonging and Identity

Another novel claim of the fashion week is that it provides a sense of national identity and pride from the achievements of the creative sectors. Investment for the construction of identity is more than top-down or bottom-up policy interventions. Promoting the key features of local community and adapting them to local characteristics enables the community to take advantage of the benefits that the fashion week is intended to achieve. Holding a fashion week requires collective effort in its execution. The effort required to organise the event enables a sense of ownership and belonging to the local community. This is evident with Dunedin, the most Scottish New Zealand town with a largely tertiary-student population which translate to a vibrant youth culture, upbeat music scene, dynamic visual arts community, and burgeoning fashion boutique culture. By holding fashion week, the local community joins forces cohesively at work. It is claimed that the fashion week captures a sense of belonging within this urban and youthful city.

On the other side of the globe in São Paulo, the importance of its fashion industry has made it the creative support for not only various forms of aesthetic expression but also the diverse ethnic communities. For a decade, the official Brazilian fashion calendar has embodied this mission fostering proposals in a range of artistic productions. Through organising a fashion week, it has mobilised local community and strengthened local identities. It has encouraged collaboration among a diverse mix of communities generating social harmony, which is of much need for a multi-cultural city like São Paulo. Such benefits go well beyond monetary benefits from the fashion industry.

6. The Changing Fashion City

The model of fashion week explains why it has taken place so enthusiastically in many post-industrial cities. Like many cultural policies, it promotes directly or indirectly the cultural and creative industries encouraging the development of local milieu²⁵ and the creative class.²⁶ The policy of investing in the cultural and creative sectors is often considered a practice to encourage the development of the local environment and to increase international competition. Yet, without a deepening knowledge of the actual industry, instrumentalising the sector with high intangible value would only result in the development of the city from the viewpoint of cultural and creative consumption rather than that of the production. Unlike the international art, film and music festivals out of which cultural tourism is generated, branding a fashion city promotes capitalist consumption. It is unclear as to how sustainable the tourism-led new-rise fashion weeks and their contribution to the local fashion industry will be. The whole point is to drive the economy.

Holding a fashion week no longer seems necessary to be considered as significant within the fashion industry. Material production is not a key drive for a fashion city, rather the symbolic production of fashion is important. New understanding is then required to comprehend these new fashion cities. Agins²⁷

observes that the fashion industry has increasingly looked like an advanced producer service under advanced capitalism. Accordingly, the new fashion cities are less significant as centres of design tradition or clusters of highly skilled manufacturing. Yet what kind of fashion city are these when the agenda of many new-rise fashion weeks has little to do with the mechanics of the fashion industry itself? In many cases, new-rise fashion weeks give importance to both the tangible and intangible assets given the material and immaterial properties of fashion. Hence, they are implemented to achieve institutionalised objectives that often address local welfare, lifestyle, economy, society and environment. Fashion has long been commoditised, packaged and repackaged for sale as an entity itself. In his chapter seen here, Nathaniel Dafydd Beard rightly points out that fashion has been strategically used in the pursuit of regional and international prestige. It generates an 'It' factor for the users be they in the marketplace or political circles. The fact that fashion is the tastemaker has become an invaluable asset for cultural policymakers. Equipped with the tastemaker is its collective imagination generated by the media, photography and cinema within which images associated are ready-made and ready to consume. Following this vein, fashion, in the context of new-rise fashion week, has been taken as an available resource to pursue institutional agenda from around the world. It is particularly prevalent in post-industrial cities where city branding has become part of urban development. A process of 'fashionalisation' is here at play, enabling many cities to transform from their post-industrial to consumer stage. Fashion week is instrumental to their growth and development constituting an identity for which they are so in need. The real value of the fashion week is then connected to the perception of the event from which emerges an image linked intrinsically to the new city's façade in the world stage. In sum, the tangible and intangible assets of the fashion week together with its generated image constitute and distinguish the city in the context of global competition.

Competition between cities, observes Massey²⁸ and Sassen²⁹ encourages a hierarchical reordering of cities across the planet. Agins further coined the phrase 'the end of fashion' and acutely points to the upsetting hierarchy of fashion cities across the globe challenging the dominant players in trend endorsement. As such, is there a reordering of fashion cities across the globe and, if so, to what extent? In the event of the new-rise fashion weeks, none of them (as of today) appears to override that of key fashion capitals. The dominant fashion weeks of Paris, Milan and New York for example, continue to legitimate designers, endorsing new creations. Their unchanging power saw the continual venture of young Japanese designers to Paris Fashion Week for legitimacy despite Tokyo's crowned fashion capital status.³⁰ The proliferation of fashion weeks across the globe only further enforces the legitimacy of the dominant players. One can easily appear in a local fashion week, while showing in one of the dominant fashion capitals would require additional effort, external endorsement and increase investment. Seldom do new-

rise fashion weeks dominate key fashion magazines in their seasonal issues, like the major fashion weeks do. Designers under the phenomenon of global fashion week are rather seen as the victims of the system as many new-rise fashion weeks have no roots in fashion production, let alone promotion of them. The rise of new fashion cities may well have promoted alternative ways of creative practice and routes to succeed in the fashion industry. Their vibrancy evidently promotes diversity in fashion styles and trends, however only to a certain extent. The fact that the objectives of many new-rise fashion weeks are intrinsically linked to city branding and the economy transforms the role of the fashion week. Given that fashion is a resource with fashion week being one of its devices, it becomes enslaved by state and institutional agendas. While some new-rise fashion weeks act as a solvent to the host cities' internal affairs, the fashion week contest would be a long march for many new hosts to succeed locally and globally.

Notes

¹ W. Ling, 'The Fashion Week Contest and its Dialectics,' *Conference Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Design History and Design Studies*, Osaka University, 2008, pp. 282-285.

² G. Hubbard, 'Business, Knowledge, and Global Growth,' *Capitalism and Society*, Vol. 1, Iss. 3, Art. 1.

³ K. Ohmae, *The End of the Nation-State: The Rise of Regional Economies*, Free Press, New York, 1996.

⁴ N. Jewson and S. MacGregor, *Transforming Cities: New Spatial Divisions and Social Transformation*, Routledge, London, 1997.

⁵ S. Sassen, *Cities in the World Economy*, New Pine Press, London, 1994.

⁶ D. Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994; L. Gibson and D. Stevenson, 'Urban Space and the Users of Culture,' *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 10, Iss. 1, 2004, pp. 1-4.

⁷ G. Evans, *Cultural Planning: An Urban Renaissance?* Routledge, London, 2001; H. Mommaas, 'City Branding: The Necessity of Socio-Cultural Goals,' in M. Vermeulen (ed), *City Branding: Image Building and Building Images*, NAI Publishers, Rotterdam, 2002; S. Lash and C. Lury, 'Global Cultural Industry,' *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 59, Iss. 2, 2008, pp. 379-380.

⁸ F. Biancini, 'Re-Imaging the City,' in J. Corner and S. Hartley (eds), *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, Routledge, London, 1991; G. Mulgan, 'The Changing Shape of the City,' in S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990.

⁹ G. Evans, 'Hard Branding the Culture City: From Prado to Prada,' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2003, pp. 417-440; J.

Entwistle and A. Rocamora, 'The Field of Fashion Realized: A Case Study of London Fashion Week,' *Sociology*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2006.

¹⁰ S. Donald, 'Stripes and My Country: City Brands for 2006,' paper presented at *Branding Cities and Urban Borders: Cosmopolitanisms and Parochialisms in Europe and Asia Pacific*, Australia Centre, London, 12-14 January, 2006.

¹¹ Ling, op. cit.

¹² D. Gilbert, 'From Paris to Shanghai: The Changing Geographies of Fashion's World Cities,' in C. Breward and D. Gilbert (eds), *Fashion's World Cities*, Berg, Oxford, 2006, p. 4.

¹³ Evans, 2003, op. cit.; Entwistle and Rocamora, op. cit.

¹⁴ Donald, op. cit.

¹⁵ Gilbert, op. cit., p. 4.

¹⁶ *Vancouver Fashion Week*, viewed 15 October 2006, <<http://www.vanfashionweek.com/press.html>>.

¹⁷ *Jakarta Fashion Week*, viewed 15 October 2006, <<http://www.dexigner.com/fashion/announcements-g741.html>>.

¹⁸ *Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week*, viewed 15 October 2006, <<http://thestar.com.my/fashionweek/story.asp?file=/2005/5/4/fashionweek/10859963andsec=fashionweek>>.

¹⁹ *Singapore Fashion Week*, viewed 15 October 2006, <<http://www.singaporefashionfestival.com.sg/>>.

²⁰ *Shanghai Fashion Week Expo*, viewed 15 October 2006, <<http://www.fashionweekexpo.com/fashionweekexpo/about.htm>>.

²¹ *Kenya Fashion Week*, viewed 15 October 2006, <<http://www.artmatters.info/fashionweek.htm>>.

²² S. Emling, 'Big 4 Fashion Weeks Get New Company,' *International Herald Tribune*, 3 October, 2006, viewed 17 May 2008. <<http://www.iht.com/articles/2006/10/03/features/Rweeks.php>>.

²³ *Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week*, op. cit.

²⁴ Emling, op. cit.

²⁵ C. Landry, *The Art of City Making*, Earthscan Publications Ltd, London, 2006.

²⁶ R. Florida *The Rise of the Creative Class and How it's Transforming Work, Leisure and Everyday Life*, Basic Books, New York, 2002.

²⁷ T. Agins, *The End of Fashion*, Harper Collins, New York, 1999.

²⁸ Massey, op. cit.

²⁹ Sassen, op. cit.

³⁰ Y. Kawamura, *The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion*, Berg, Oxford, 2004.

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