

## How Can Social-Cultural Values Nurture Sustainability in the Fashion Sector?

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### Abstract

**Background scientific research:** The current socio-cultural panorama requires much more extreme attention in redefining the values of the products that belong to the Fashion sector through research for authenticity in the productions, incorporating ethical values and social governance, and more conscious consumption. According to this, Fashion brands, as demonstrated by the 2019 Fashion Pact ([www.thefashionpact.org](http://www.thefashionpact.org)), are constantly demanded to show a respectable, unequivocal, and credible company reputation. Such status is not only expressed through the transparency and traceability of their fashion businesses' operations but above all, through a continuous social and cultural exchange through on-going narratives with their consumers and their wider audience (Arrigo, 2015; Levitt, 1965). Therefore, the socio-cultural component is an essential driver for culture-intensive industries in differentiating products and gaining a competitive advantage (Bertola et. al, 2016). This variable becomes "cultural authenticity", which means both pinpointing on exclusivity, uniqueness and originality of the process that generated specific products or services, but also implying a strong connection with heritage, productive culture of a specific territory, the communities of workers, to which those very products and services belong (Bruner 1986, 1991; Vacca 2013, Brawn and Vacca, 2022).

**Research issue to be addressed:** The culture of design reconfigures socio-cultural sources in new artifacts not only developing highly narrative content, but also stimulating innovation, pursuing new languages, increasing the potential of the evocative dimension, moving along the value chain creating new meanings and promoting new models of socio-cultural sustainable development. Moreover, the socio-culture dimension reflects a specific identity through which it can be accepted and embedded into contemporary cultures and engage in a process of collective reputation in which brands and customers collaborate and co-create contents (Moisander and Personen 2002). In those specific fields of practice, the paper will discuss how socio-cultural values can nurture sustainability in the Fashion sector, with an ostensibly emphasis on their attention to authenticity, respect for time, craftsmanship and ecologies and on their ability in promoting values for social justice, sharing practices, responsibility and sustainable development (Kim, Ko, 2010). In fact,

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if on the one hand, the intrinsic value in Fashion production has a social impact on costumers' behavior as there is a growing awareness of fashion consumption on people, of the ethical issues and more concern over the different stages of production. On the other hand, culture intensive industries, such as fashion, embeds cultural capital values (Throsby, 1999) as an aggregate of tangible and intangible factors which is continuously reinvested in the development of new artifacts, goods, and services but also the bearer of new values and meanings (Sennet, 2008; Vacca, 2013).

**Methodology used:** According to the authors' investigation, a mapping of socio-cultural sustainability practices of European Fashion companies is carried out through an iterative process to model the data. The paper is based on the authors' research and reflections on the topic. Here, the data pool produced by authors' contributions to several research projects (DGGROW, Mapping Sustainable Fashion Opportunities for SMEs, 2019; Erasmus+, FashionSEEDS, 2019) is analyzed. In addition, further specific data are drawn upon the research carried out by one of the authors (Vacca, 2021; Bertola et al., 2020; I was a Sari, 2013; Design Re: Lab, 2002), the doctoral thesis of one of them (D'Itria, 2022) and their previous publications on the topic (Brown and Vacca, 2022). An initial desk research phase was followed by applying a case study methodology to narrow the selected scope of research into topics. This process resulted in codifying two main directions that the fashion industry is adopting for enhancing sustainability through a socio-cultural perspective I: (1) Understand current industry strategies to capitalize on the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the process that generated products or services, and (2) implementing sustainability by shifting companies' narrative by stressing their attributes of care for the environment, artisanship, and territories, and their role in fostering social equity, inclusive practices, and responsibility. Selected case studies, that emerged from the research phase, are presented as best practices. The authors focus on these specific cases, but simultaneously take account of the whole context encompassing many variables and qualities for restituting explicative knowledge (Johansson, 2007).

**Results achieved:** The paper illustrates how fostering socio-cultural sustainability for Fashion brands creates strategic actions that stimulate and develop the production and competencies of local systems. Such strategies in now enhancing "cultural authenticity" by engaging specific pieces of knowledge and communities that contribute to the brands' uniqueness triggering a sustainable innovation in the production sectors they represent.

**Keywords:** socio-cultural sustainability, cultural capital, cultural authenticity, culture intensive industries, processes of change in the fashion system.

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## 1. Introduction

The discipline of Design at the intersection of culture, consumption, and change decodes cultural transformations to anchor itself in local culture and better connect with future possibilities. Design practices shape cultural developments, their driving forces, and patterns of change. Thus, it can think possible new cultural scenarios intrinsic to new future senses to guide through a socio-cultural change in products and services. (Bertola, Vacca, Colombi, Iannilli, Augello, 2016).

Fashion, as one of the Design domains, is a means to shape contemporary culture, relying on its capability to read and balance the dynamics between individuals and society. It is a fundamental means of balancing as it lets people position the time and place they exist, linking their social relations with the world.

Fashion as an industry underwent different transformations. It operates across different scales from bespoke to mass production, creating occupations within communities and remote offices which are inextricably linked with the implications of 21<sup>st</sup>-century living. (Williams et al., 2019).

In particular, the scale at which it operates – worldwide - and the patterns of offshoring and outsourcing that have developed due to the globalization phenomenon deeply engage fashion in undergoing processes of sustainability to lessen its planetary impact (Dhir, 2022; Arrigo, 2021). Such processes aim to respond with resilience, collaboration, knowledge, and skills to the sector sustainability challenges ranging from soil and water exploitation, fractured communities, and loss of biodiversity (Niinimäki, 2021; Fashion Pact, 2019; Fletcher, 2017). Particular attention has been paid to producing fashion and textiles, one of the broader environmentally polluting sectors: Manufacturing involves many processes characterized by a detrimental environmental impact (Nayak et al., 2020). Fashion makes a sizeable contribution to climate change, resources exploitation, and systemic pollution in the presented scenario. McKinsey reported how the sector was responsible for some 2.1 billion metric tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2018, about 4 percent of the global total. To set that in context, the fashion industry emits about the same quantity of GHGs per year as the entire economies of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom combined. Every year, the fashion industry produces and sells somewhere between 80 billion and 150 billion garments globally. Of these productions, nearly three-fifths of all clothing produced ends up in incinerators or landfills within years of being made. In the last five years, fashion industry adopted various strategies and initiatives implemented at different stages of the supply chain, based on resources optimization, circularity, and collaborative networks (Colucci and Vecchi, 2020).

According to this, the number of fashion brands engaging in green-branding initiatives is rising. Environmental sustainability is becoming an essential point in the brands' agenda that is being prioritized among fashion companies (Jensen and Whitfield, 2022).

In this context, where the green brand strategies are now leveraging connections of the consumer, brand, and environmental and economic sustainability (Kim and Hall, 2015), the present paper aims to emphasize the other two pillars of sustainability: Society and culture. Following UCLG's (2010) proposed vision of sustainability as four-pillar: environment, economy, society, and culture. This work aims to emphasize the fundamental role of socio-cultural spheres as vectors of sustainable change for the fashion industry.

As discussed, sustainability in fashion must address the challenge of globalization and the reification of productive activities. This can be done by opposing models characterized by particularism and searching for authenticity in this capitalistic system. Such models are enabled by the recovery and enhancement of unique traditions and artisanal knowledge, which restore the proper notion of time against the speed of the globalized fashion sector (Thompson, 2022). In this perspective, the appreciation of traditional local practices and the promotion of the cultural capital of a specific social community is fostered. This makes it possible to work with a different understanding of the global/local relationship that contributes to creating strategic actions for inspiring and enabling the production and cultural aptitudes of local systems.

Such an approach incentivizes practices of adaptation to new fashion contexts and business models. Traditional knowledge is cultivated without losing authenticity and, in many cases, it is possible to improve the living conditions of the artisans and communities involved. This is through the involvement of prestigious artisans who contribute to the uniqueness and identity of their own area. Innovation is thus produced in the sectors they represent and conveyed into fashion products (Latilla et al., 2019). As part of such a system, companies incentive and support the formation of their craftsmen. These actions result in training programs that aim to develop the skills associated with craftsmanship and production. They offer an educational experience through structured training programs and specific technical training for employees working in different departments of the company (Tarquini et al. 2022).

According to those mentioned above, the paper explores how socio-cultural values can nurture sustainability in the Fashion sector. How an emphasis on authenticity, respect for time, craftsmanship and ecologies can foster a positive change driven by the market and the consumers. Such change is allowing the affirmation of such sustainability principles and practices in the Fashion industry. Companies do not work only on minimizing negative impact, but also on maximizing positive impact, allowing individuals, communities, and economic systems to flourish. From this emerges how working for sustainability means questioning the status quo by finding new ways of working that ensure a human-scale ecological, social and cultural balance (Williams et al. 2009).

## **2.Methodology**

The paper aims to present the result of an investigation conducted into how Fashion Companies are carrying out socio-cultural sustainability initiatives making it possible to create strategic actions that can stimulate and develop the production and skills of local systems. Involving prestigious realities and communities contributes to the uniqueness of the brands themselves, thus triggering sustainable innovation. The data analyzed are derived from the knowledge repository produced by the Fashion in Process Research Lab ([www.fashioninprocess.com](http://www.fashioninprocess.com)) at the Design Department of Politecnico di Milano of which both authors are members. The data were generated from: (1) the research conducted by the research Lab (DGGROW, Mapping Sustainable Fashion Opportunities for SMEs, 2019; Erasmus+, FashionSEEDS, 2019); (2) the doctoral research of one of the authors (D'Itria, 2022); (3) several research carried out by one of the authors (Vacca, 2021; Bertola et al., 2020; I was a Sari, 2013; Design Re: Lab, 2002). Also, a previous publication (Brawn and Vacca, 2022) was adopted as the point of reference for the development of the framework as it shares a part of the study pool with specific reference to the focus on the impact of the socio-cultural dimension on sustainability in the

According to the authors' investigation, a mapping of socio-cultural sustainability practices of European Fashion companies is carried out through an iterative process to model the data. An initial desk research phase was followed by applying a case study methodology to narrow the selected scope of research into topics. This process resulted in codifying main sustainability-driven approaches that inform the definition of directions in addressing socio-cultural matters. These directions set the boundaries for the study focusing the topic in a so broad field of study. A selection of case studies, that emerged from the research phase, are presented as best practices. As discussed, the authors focus on these specific cases, but simultaneously take account of the whole context encompassing many variables and qualities for restituting explicative knowledge (Johansson, 2007).

Methodologically, three phases were carried out to build iterative knowledge: (1) the first phase consisted of desk research on current practices in the fashion industry to map current sustainability practices and identify best practices; (2) the second phase consisted of further in-depth qualitative analysis of the identified best practices; (3) and the last phase combined all the data to outline company directions for implementing sustainability through socio-cultural innovation practices.

The mapping led to the identification of 72 companies located in 20 nations in the European continent, which have addressed the socio-cultural aspects of sustainability in their practices. The composition of the company was heterogeneous. They were NGOs/sector organizations (19%), textiles companies (7%) and brands of shoes (3%), apparel (64%), and accessories (7%). Of the 72 companies mapped, 8 were selected as case studies. All these companies stand out for the way they are pursuing implementations of sustainable d

practices within their system, often adopting a design-driven approach as support. The following phase consists of further desk analysis and selected long-distance interviews with representatives from the companies. These companies have distinguished themselves through their socio-cultural sustainability practices, oriented toward the recovery and enhancement of fashion-design approaches to intangible and material culture. By using the case studies, the authors were able to explore possible theoretical relationships, for which the study had started and allowed for a deeper understanding of the subject (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991). The third phase consisted of interpreting the data collected. Starting from the previous analyses and discussions inherent in the data pool examined, the authors focused on a specific aspect that emerged during the definition of the "Cultural Sustainability through Craft" model (Brown and Vacca, 2022). The topic of socio-cultural impact on sustainability in the fashion industry is addressed defining the specific features that characterize the different practices. Building on this assumption, the specific objectives were to analyze in detail causes, methods, actors and relationships to define the sustainability directions the sector is following in this moment.

The analysis is qualitative to offer a holistic and in-depth investigation that should capture the complexity of the single cases (Feagin et al., 1991). Indeed, such a qualitative approach, while not measurable or quantifiable, is more appropriate to present a broader description that results in inductive observations and conclusions. However, the authors acknowledge the limitations of such an approach. The results are processed through the authors' perspective and are intended to relate to the reliability of the practices analyzed.

### **3.The Case studies**

Based on what has been discussed so far, this paper aims to attempt to codify the knowledge pools to identify the directions that guide current design-led practices in the field of socio-cultural sustainability in the fashion industry.

This section will discuss the results of the methodology by presenting several case studies that illustrate the main directions identified by the study. These directions could inspire and promote significant new perspectives in sustainable fashion design. This paper aims to define potential pathways for the preservation and enhancement of the culture, territories and people involved and how they are addressed to ensure sustainable development.

From an operational perspective, the work identified two macro themes in the approach to sustainability through socio-cultural practices--from a design perspective--that emerged from the material culture preservation debate. As discussed in the literature (Fry, 2009; Boehner et al., 2022; Brown and Vacca, 2022;

DelSesto, 2022), it is evident how strategies are developed that maintain traditional economic activity and work culture while building new directions in understanding the need to maintain the craft and knowledge their products relies upon. This becomes a means to train young people for the longevity of craftsmanship or educate communities to enable forms of conservation of specific know-how or teach a specific manual art to have a positive impact on specific territories or groups of people.

These strategies move in a common path, rooted in the action of training, but present different directions on how companies put these actions into practice.

Brands such as Brunello Cucinelli or Bulgari are working to improve their strategies to capitalize on the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the know-how that generated their products or services. They are carrying out actions for building training paths to preserve artisan knowledge. Borbonese and Brioni, on the other hand, focus on paths guided by the technological vector to bring innovation. At the intersection of these two, we find realities such as Gucci. The brand's Ecolé de l'amour experiments with the role of the socio-cultural dimension both to enable the continuation of knowledge and to bring innovation. Other cases implement sustainability shifting their practices and emphasizing their attributes of care for the environment, craftsmanship, and territories. Designers such as Stella Jean or Angel Chung focus on targeted operations to work with communities and recover knowledge that is used by the brand for the realization of their product and, in turn, train the communities involved in capitalizing on their knowledge by making them part of the global market through the brand platform. San Patrignano or the Roman brand Carmina Campus both use the training of socially fragile communities to recover people and territories and bestow dignity through manual arts. So we discuss strategies that have a common pattern of formation, but the study examines how the identified directions differ from each other. The analysis offers an in-depth investigation that aims at a broader description of the behaviors identified. Despite this, there are limits within which these behaviors are adopted. The different cases, even if they follow a common guideline, are to be understood in the specificity of their context, of their territory and of the actors involved: Each direction is composed of a plurality of meanings and values that each case study incorporates.

In the following section, the selected cases are explored to show how it was possible to find different behaviors among those traced.

### **3.1 Preserving the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the product/service process**

The first direction refers to the rising strategies adopted by the fashion industry for capitalizing on the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the know-how that generated their products or services.

Cultural material is here recognized as an asset for the company. The companies that fall into this area develop tactics that safeguard know-how and traditions by enhancing the formation of new generations on traditional craft skills.

This path includes companies that do training to (1) preserve specific craft knowledge that their products rely on and (2) those who do training to innovate systems, and products or to make training a kind of social reinstatement with the involvement of academies.

The first group of companies finds excellent cases that are driven by the need to train skilled artisans such as Bulgari, Brunello Cucinelli, and LVMH. These companies are motivated by several factors, the absence of craft-specific vocational courses or the rising unwillingness of students to continue their work path within a company. To tackle this phenomenon that results in the loss of artisan knowledge and techniques, which characterize their uniqueness and product values, they provide the best-facilitated apprenticeship routes to ensure their own generational turnover. Although driven by a common purpose, each of these brands has declined the solutions adopted according to their own inclinations.

Bulgari is now working on developing a training program dedicated to the growth of new staff. In 2017, the brand unveiled their *Bulgari Jewellery Academy* (<https://www.bulgari.com/it-it/corporate-social-responsibility/social-commitment/community.html>). This school is an in-house training program based in Valenza, the international capital of fine jewellery in the north of Italy. The academy aims to enhance the professional skills of employees while creating new job opportunities. The brand's master goldsmiths pass on their knowledge and skills in manufacturing luxury jewelry to young professionals. The goal is to leverage creativity, knowledge sharing, and talent enhancement. The program has enabled the training of new people who have joined directly the Roman company or are now employed in major companies in the Valencia area pursuing the key professions of goldsmithing.

Also LVMH, the world leader in the luxury industry offers 31 training courses to transmit and value their artisans savoir-fair in seven specific areas: Tailoring, knitwear, silk, leather goods, shoes, goldsmithing and retail. These training activities are part of the LVMH's *Institut des Métiers d'Excellence* (<https://www.lvmh.fr/talents/metiers-dexcellence/institut-des-metiers-dexcellence/#:~:text=L'Institut%20des%20M%C3%A9tiers%20d'Excellence%20LVMH%20a%20%C3%A9t%C3%A9%20cr%C3%A9%C3%A9,et%20des%20personnes%20en%20reconversion.>). This is an alternance training program developed in partnership with prestigious educational institutions. Students benefit from a pathway that combines technical and theoretical instruction at partner schools and experience within the maisons of the LVMH group. During the course, students also benefit from foreign language courses, meetings with artisans, experts, and designers, and visits to ateliers or boutiques during specific Master

Classes. The Institute aims to maintain the cultural material on which luxury fashion is based through the involvement and qualification of young people as a vector for the long-term sustainability of luxury craftsmanship.

Another interesting case is provided by Brunello Cucinelli. The eponymous brand, is deeply rooted in the Umbria region, its area of production, and worked on a strategy for preventing young people from leaving these territories and their traditions. As a result, the *School of High Contemporary Crafts for Arts and Crafts* was opened in Solomeo (<https://www.brunellocucinelli.com/en/solomeo-school.html>). The school is inspired by the Ruskin and Morris principles of Arts and Crafts. This is a fashion and tailoring school fueled by the collaboration between the Brunello Cucinelli and the local manufacturing firms. Students take theoretical-practical classes flanked by teachers who have been working in Brunello Cucinelli for years. In this school, new generations learn the methods and knowledge of the oldest techniques to reconstruct local cultural identity and beyond.

Hence, as shown by the cases, this direction foster the recruitment and training of new generations of fashion professionals to capitalize on the cultural value of the knowledge of the craftsmen of the brands to differentiate products and maintain their competitive advantage.

The second path identified is based on experimental didactic approaches, in which the ultimate goal is not only to transfer craft knowledge and preserve this value but to engage academics, artists or designers to work on innovation and also to experiment with new languages. These are different approaches

to nurturing socio-cultural sustainability through material culture preservation and capitalization. Companies such as Borbonese or Tod's engage with academies starting from the brands' own heritage to interpret it in an innovative way. By engaging the academies they interact with a new generation of creatives by merging their personal background with that of the brand.

An example of this kind of partnership is the one between Officina Borbonese ([https://www.instagram.com/accounts/login/?next=%2Fofficina\\_borbonese%2F](https://www.instagram.com/accounts/login/?next=%2Fofficina_borbonese%2F)) and several international educational realities such as Accademia Costume & Moda, Milano Fashion Institute, Parsons Paris and Istituto Marangoni. They work on projects in both fashion design and fashion communication management. The brand aim is to create a community of young creatives who reinterpret the brand's values to develop the new Borbonese era. One example is the "Savoy Faire" project that began in February 2020, which involved students from Parsons Paris and Parsons New York in Fashion Design and Brand Management. It was a creative journey that had as its main inspiration the tradition of tapestries in Sardinian craftsmanship. There was a focus on sustainability, craftsmanship, the choice of controlled supply chain materials, the

enhancement of local cultures, and a focus on women-owned businesses. To this end, the artisan cooperative Su Trobasciu of Mogoro, a small town in the province of Oristano, was involved as main partner in the project. The artisans introduced students to the knowledge of tapestry making and the use of traditional techniques and materials. Fashion Design students created a Special Edition Bag, while Strategic Design and Management students finalized the marketing and communication strategy for launching the product in a new market through brand positioning analysis.

Instead, Tod's founded its Academy as a laboratory of ideas based at its headquarters in the Marche region of Italy. The idea is to create a place for making and thinking, where artisans support students, offering them knowledge and techniques for making new products. The school involved in the project is England's Central Saint Martins. The goal is to continue the traditional skills used and mix them with each creative's modern and personal point of view. The designer confronts and elaborates Tod's values in a context of creativity, craftsmanship and knowledge exchange. The project involves 35 young designers, chosen directly from Central Saint Martins (<https://www.todsgroup.com/it/news/tods-academy-e-central-saint-martins-presentano-tods-legacy>). Each student is asked to give his or her own interpretation of one or more of Tod's style codes, dwelling on the creative process that led to the final proposal. In this path of analysis, carried out through inventive means, each student was joined by a mentor to evaluate choices and make suggestions with the aim of bringing innovation to their work.

A case in point of a company that bridges these two directions and invests in enhancing its artisanal capital through education is Gucci. In 2018, the Italian brand launched *École de l'Amour*, the School of Love (<https://equilibrium.gucci.com/it/gucci-ecole-de-lamour/>).

The school represents an innovative approach to socio-cultural sustainability which blends the goal of transmitting know-how and experience, in the field of craftsmanship, for the sustainability of the company, alongside the innovation of meaning and process brought about by design. The final goal is to safeguard know-how and increase efficiency and effectiveness in their production chain. The educational model is designed to transmit knowledge and craftsmanship and production skills: Gucci's artisans train and educate, passing on their knowledge to the next generation of craftsmen. The teaching staff of these training courses is composed of specialized craftsmen and company executives who dedicate part of their time to lessons. The school aims also to be an innovation hub, which focuses on R&D and Gucci's willingness to invest in fashion innovation on a larger scale. The aim of the training courses developed is to help further increase the culture of sustainability for the future of the brand.

All the presented companies, that work on this second path, recognize that education and the transmission of craft skills and know-how are essential for the long-term sustainability of companies, which rely on their craft traditions to think about the design of the future.

### **3.2 Capitalizing on artisanal knowledge**

The second direction characterizes companies implementing sustainability by shifting their practices and working on their attributes of care for the environment, artisanship, and territories.

This direction is oriented toward enhancing and, in some cases, reactivating material culture through a project approach that enhances artisan communities that hold specific cultural heritage while also enhancing the human capital involved. The relationship that designers establish with artisans is one of exchange and transfer of their knowledge and techniques.

As discussed by Vacca (2013), in these relationships, craft communities become not mere performers but an integral part of the design process through their skills and creative intelligence. These cases distinguished themselves for their approach that aims to promote this cultural exchange through the integration of artisan communities in their practice. This is a training activity in the sense that it takes place through the exchange and acquisition of knowledge and practices and aims to alleviate poverty and contribute to the social and creative empowerment of the artisan communities involved, through work. Designers as Angel Chung or Stella Jean channel their generative actions into the design to achieve unique objects that are expressions of the artifact's heritage. What characterizes each case is the way their approach these paths: Angel Chang is managing to train a new generation of artisans and keep the tradition alive through the ability to generate a reasonable income from the craftwork by incorporating it into her collection, while Stella Jean's work focuses on developing a standard of sustainability and multiculturalism applied to the fashion industry.

The first case which is emblematic of this direction is Angel Chang (<https://angelchang.com/>). The eponymous brand was founded in 2012, working with ethnic minority master textile artisans in the mountains of Guizhou (Gwaydzoh) province. The designer discovered the traditions of these minorities through a visit to a museum in Shanghai that had on display a variety of Chinese ethnic minority costumes. On this occasion, she discovered that this tradition would likely die within the next 5 to 10 years due to the fact that young generation were not interested in the traditional craft arts. In 2012, The American-Chinese designer moved to a remote mountain village in Guizhou province, rural China, to learn the traditional fabric-making techniques still practiced by the indigenous Miao, Dong, and Buyi tribes. What characterizes their

work is that all the cotton they use is grown locally, and if they want a specific color dye, they wait until the right flower is in bloom. Their work got back to seasonality and respect for nature and times.

The collaboration between Angel Chang and the communities try to preserve these ancient techniques by helping to gain recognition for the traditional craft in the international marketplace. Chang is eager to communicate the breadth of ethnic diversity within China to the outside world. The history, mythology and culture of which is expressed through dress and textiles, acting as the oral history of the community.

Instead, Stella Jean's work focuses on the use of the inherent potential of the fashion industry as a cultural activity that can provide decent work opportunities for men and women worldwide. The goal is to have a significant impact on poverty reduction while supporting the spread of development that is first and foremost humane, inclusive and equitable.

From these premises, the designer launched the *Laboratorio delle Nazioni - Business Model and Sustainable Development Platform project* (<https://www.stellajeans.it/project/>). This platform was created to support her work with artisan communities. The model developed not only recognizes and spreads the culture with which it comes into contact but also contributes to the emancipation of the communities involved through the development of a sustainable

business model. The designer has codified her working model in 7 steps. The first step is the recovery of craftsmanship, which supports an action to recuperate knowledge and techniques, then the phase of cultural heritage as an enabler and engine of sustainable development through the definition of a design-driven strategy, enhancing opportunities through transfer and exchange of the knowledge of craftsmen, the establishment of the enterprise, the consequent development of the promotion, such as for the development of tourism and commerce initiatives, the creation and implementation of an international trade development platform and finally the transformation of this work into a channel of integrationist contamination which means promoting a cultural crossover in which no identity is ever compromised. Still, a defined work and cooperation are established.

In all the cases presented in this section, the cultural link with the development of products made through traditional handicrafts becomes a means of training the communities holding that knowledge with the necessary skills to preserve them. Moreover, the enhancement and creation of a story around the product give additional intangible value to the item and its history and that of the people and communities who made it.

### 3.3 Empowering Communities through Craft Education

The third direction addresses the issues of socio-cultural sustainability concerning specific communities involved. This direction aims to rehabilitate through material culture the disadvantaged communities with which fashion companies dialogue by enhancing the human capital involved. Training action is intrinsic to the process that companies establish with communities: an exchange and transfer of knowledge and techniques. These are phenomena of social innovation that promote in different forms the emancipation of fragile communities that do not hold a specific cultural heritage: prisoners, drug addicts, or migrants. The actions carried out focus on the development of training that supports social development and rehabilitates through the dignity of labor. Examples of such practices are the projects carried out by Carmina Campus, with the cooperative Socially MadeinItaly, with the aim of enabling, through handicrafts, the reintegration into society of female inmates of Italian prisons, and Zegna, with San Patrignano, for the "Art for Earth" project that involves drug-addicted girls, engaged in recovery paths, in the textile workshop to enhance a handicraft trade, contributing to the girls' training.

Made in Prison (<https://www.carminacampus.com/it/progetto-made-in-prison/>) is an initiative born in March 2015, from the collaboration between the Roman brand Carmina Campus and Socially MadeinItaly, a group of social cooperatives long active inside Italian prisons. The project allowed the brand, with its artisans, to provide professional training to improve the skill level of inmates admitted into the program and maintain an adequate quality standard of the Made in Prison line of products. The ultimate goal was to train female inmates with craft skills, related to the making of bags and accessories, to facilitate their reintegration into society once they have served their sentences. The brand contributes knowledge and tutoring while Socially MadeinItaly manages the processing workshops within eleven penitentiaries on the Italian territory. The medium-term goal is rehabilitative, but the creation of job opportunities aims in the long term to increase the involvement of Italian fashion in a more ethical and socially useful "made in Italy" production system.

Another interesting case, is that of Fondazione Zegna cha has been collaborating for several years with the textile workshop of the San Patrignano rehabilitation community for young drug addicts (<https://www.fondazionezegna.org/partner/san-patrignano-2/>). The girls involved, about 30 or so, are confronted with the artisan know-how of weaving through the development of the necessary manual skills. In addition, confronting the outside world is of great help to the girls as they closely observe working methods, the approach to creativity and technique, and the development of an idea that becomes material and is then put on the market. In particular, the collaboration for the creation of the A/W 2020 collection entitled "Art for Earth" was analyzed. The Weaving Laboratory of San Patrignano contributed in the research activities and new experiments in which alongside noble yarns were woven unprecedented materials in

endless combinations. Under the guidance of Alessandro Sartori, the brand's designer, fabrics in 100 percent regenerated cashmere were created for the handloom.

The cases presented here discuss how education in manual techniques and the development of products made through traditional crafts becomes a means of bringing social innovation to disadvantaged contexts. Even if the communities involved do not hold the material knowledge they acquire the skills necessary to preserve it and use it as a means of social empowerment and redemption. Moreover, the creation of storytelling about the genesis of the product lends an additional intrinsic value in the object that tells about the people and communities who made it.

#### **4. Conclusions**

From what has been illustrated, craftsmanship education emerges as a strategic factor that nourishes sustainability and guides the approach of fashion companies towards development through continuous investment in the specific human and cultural capital of communities and territories.

The study presented indicates the opportunities that have emerged, for fashion companies, to trigger innovative processes that favor iterative activities to preserve traditional crafts without altering the intangible and material contents of the cultures involved. Sharing, exchanging, or passing on knowledge and practices between the holders of knowledge, artisans, and design becomes the approach with which to achieve the goal of sustainability.

Training emerges as one of the main aspects that enable the continuation of traditional knowledge and techniques that embody the intrinsic values of fashion system products. The different approaches discussed are interpretations of the same goal, promoting cultural heritage as an engine of sustainable development, focusing on what happens when fashion becomes a tool for this. Each initiative is the result of building cultural bridges between fashion and the artisans of a particular country. Both to train new generations and strategically invest in preserving the know-how of their craftsmen, their brand, and product, and by enabling the communities involved in creating their own economic autonomy, preserving their knowledge skills, and traditions, and at the same time earning and affirming their own place in the global market context.