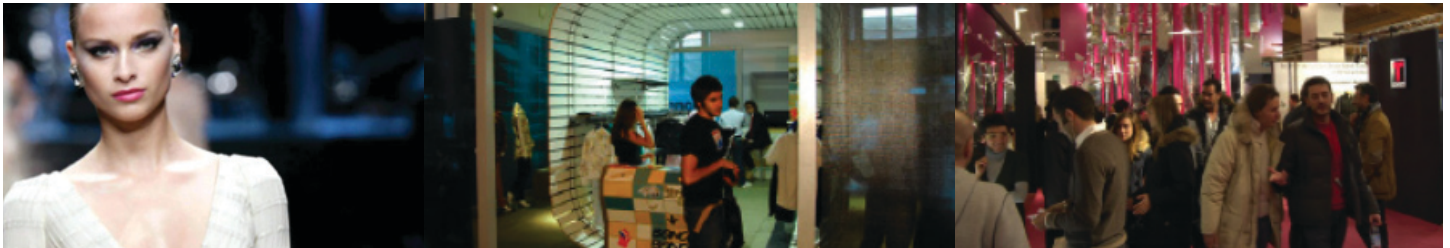


Italian Fashion & Innovation

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Introduction

In Spring 2008, the Italia Design team researched the fashion industry in Italy, and discussed briefly how it fits into Italy's overall innovation. The global public's perception of Italy and Italian Design rests to some degree on the visibility and success of Fashion Design. The fashion and design industries account for a large percentage of Milan's total economic output— as Milan goes economically, so goes Italy (Foot, 2001). Fashion Design clearly contributes to "brand Italia," as well as to Italian culture generally. Yet, fashion is not our focus in this study: innovation and design is. Fashion's goals are not the same as design. For one, fashion operates on "style," design works on "language," and style to a serious designer is usually the opposite of good design. Yet to ignore the area possibly creates a blind spot.

With the resource this year of some students with great interest in this area it was decided that we should begin to investigate how fashion in Italy contributes to innovation, and how fashion in Milan and other centers in the North of Italy sustain "Creative Centers" where measurable agglomeration (a sign of innovation) occurs. Delving into Italian Fashion allowed us to rethink certain paradigms. For one, how we look at Florence as a design center. Florence has very little Industrial Design and, because of the city's UNESCO World Heritage designation, has very little contemporary architectural culture. This reality became clear after four years of returning to the Renaissance city. As Andrea Branzi so bluntly put it this year, Florence is "a tourist town," a place to escape from— a place that one always looks out from when in it (Branzi, 2008). But Florence as a capital for fashion is thriving and bringing important cultural touch points to the Renaissance city. Studying how Florence works as an innovation and agglomeration center for fashion causes us to look differently at Florence in regards to design and innovation.

In course work prior to departing for in-field research in Italy, Azmina Karimi and Derek Pante, the designated "fashion team," explored topics such as the history of the fashion industry, its incorporation of the Italian tradition of quality, and its association with politics, architecture, and design. These topics

will be touched upon in this paper, but will not be described in full detail— for more in-depth information, please view the presentations on the Italia Design 2008 project website, “Florence and Fashion since the 1940s” (Karimi & Pante, 2008) and “Fashion in Milan” (ibid). This research served as a contextual basis to understand the Italian fashion industry, which was then applied to our dialogue on Italian innovation.

The topic of innovation in Italy has been explored extensively by Italia Design in past years and research papers: Madison Poon and Russell Taylor looked into Innovative Cities (2005) and how they operate, while the roles that agglomerations (2007) and the Creative Class (2007) play in the innovation cycle were explored in subsequent years. Heather Chiang and Russell Taylor synthesized all of these works into a single paper in 2007, with one of the major points being that a city “must change, and be reinvigorated and affected by contemporary ideas for it to move forward and stay ‘alive’, to not remain a museum of ancient policies and artifacts” (Chiang & Taylor, 2007, p.2). Chiang’s work formed the foundational basis on innovation from which the Italia Design team could infer the role that the fashion industry has in Florence and Milan’s respective innovation cycles. These inferences were then verified in-field through observations and interviews.

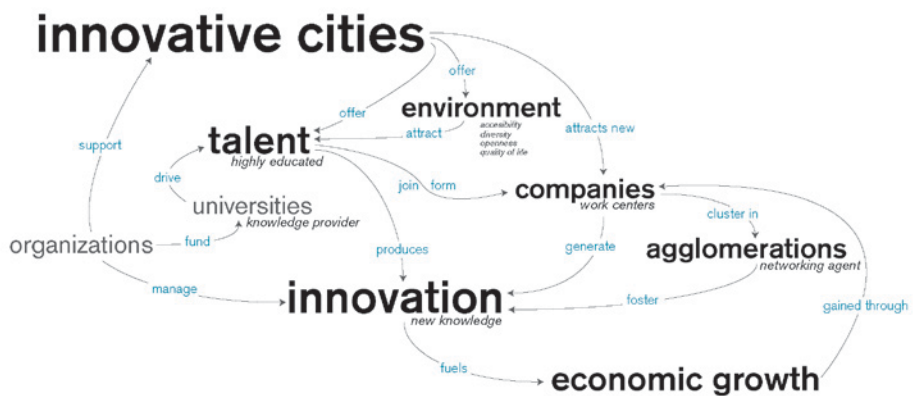
This paper will describe the fashion industry’s current role in innovation in Italy, by looking at the Pitti Immagine event in Florence and the Corso Como area and Citta della Moda complex in Milan, areas that were researched in Spring 2008 and then visited and researched by Karimi and Pante during the 2008 Italia Design Field School.

Thesis

The Italian fashion industry plays a key role in both Florence and Milan's innovation, but in different ways. In Florence, fashion-related events have lead to clusters of activity known as *agglomerations*, allowing knowledge workers to network and share knowledge; in Milan, fashion is embedded in the city's infrastructure, creating open, accessible *environments* for people to interact against the backdrop of fashion. In each case, the needs of the fashion industry, and therefore the needs of the knowledge workers within the industry and outside of it, are met through the development of spaces where agglomerations and social interactions can occur. Fashion is yet another domain where innovation can be observed and studied in Italy.

Innovative Cities Model

Samanthi Jayatileke | Katrina Chua | Azmina Karimi | Gurpreet Badesha



Innovative Cities info model by Samanthi Jayatileke, Katrina Chua, Azmina Karimi, & Gurpreet Badesha

As we can see in this model, "environment" and "agglomerations" are both important to the development of innovation in a city— a successful environment attracts and sustains knowledge workers, and supports the construction of social spaces in the city, and make it enjoyable; and agglomerations provide an area for workers and companies to cluster and where knowledge and expertise exchange can occur.

Florence: Fashion Events as International Agglomeration Hubs

The Pitti Immagine is a series of annual tradeshow and exhibitions in Florence that center mainly around fashion, and is held at the Fortezza da Basso and nearby Stazione Leopolda cultural and event centers (Pitti Immagine, 2008). These spaces allow knowledge workers and firms to come together, or agglomerate, throughout the year during a number of different fashion events. Agglomerations are clusters of knowledge workers, creative firms, research institutions and other establishments that form innovation centers and become the engine that fuels creative cities. These clusters support each other by 1) building networks to exchange knowledge, 2) collaborating with clients and among each other in close proximity, and 3) attracting more talent, which overall create an exciting place that is full of energy (Chiang & Taylor, 2007, p.22). Karimi and Pante confirmed the existence and importance of these three points in Florence through observations and interviews from the Pitti Immagine "Bimbo" (children's clothing) event in June 2008.

1. Building International Networks

One of the major aspects about the Pitti Immagine is that they are international events. According to Chiang, innovative cities "are often international hubs, in order to sustain quick international knowledge exchange, and once developed, these cities are incredibly persistent in their innovation" (Chiang & Taylor, 2007, p.22). In this regard, the Pitti events in Florence are important as they function as an international stage, an opportunity for knowledge workers and companies from all over the world to not only exhibit their work but also create networks with others in their field.



Pitti Immagine Bimbo, Summer 2008

Exhibitors, buyers, representatives and others from all over the world gather at the Pitti.

Interestingly, Pitti events occur in facilities just outside the encircling ring that once was the protective city walls of Florence. What is inside the walls of Florence has become a “museum,” and growth and development of the urbanism in a contemporary sense is by and large impossible. This is a major obstacle to economic growth in areas not connected to the city’s primary economic generator: tourism. Yet cities in Italy that live only on tourism are being crushed under the weight of such an economic handshake (Venice, Siena, San Gimignano would be other examples). The Pitti events are housed in temporary or multi-purpose facilities, so no permanent “district” is created; for example, the design clusters in Milan in Zona Tortona or the Via Durini. Yet, during “Pitti,” Florence is Italy’s most important fashion capital, eclipsing even Milan. There is something interesting about this temporariness and vagabond-ish nature. It is clearly the networks that form from Pitti which sustain its agglomeration beyond the event. The transformation of Florence into a conference, convention, and event city has had a massive new economic impact on the city, one that may begin to rival the economic reliance on tourists. For the sake of our much-beloved city, we can only hope.

Italy has long understood the value of exhibitions, of course, and their relationship to Design and Innovation. The creation of exhibitions and events was, in many ways, what put Milan, for example, on the map as a design capital in the first place. The annual events such as the Salone del Mobile and Fuori Salone have been attracting the international design elite to see what is happening in Milan since the 1950’s (Foot, 2001). The creation of these events was part of an important sequence of marketing and promotion that included publishing, design magazines, and critics— an important related infrastructure that remains in place in Milan to this day. The importance of such spaces was reinforced yet again in Milan with the construction of Massimiliano Fuksas’ Nuovo Polo Fiera in 2005 (Cochrane & Taylor, 2006). The Compasso D’Oro awards were created at the same time to add something beyond the annual show, which would recognize the best of the best every three-year cycle. But, Milan did this with dedicated event spaces such as the Triennale and the Fiera. Over time such dedicated spaces have given way to trade and exhibition centers that service a wide variety of needs. Pitti spaces, such as the Fortezza da Basso, are such spaces of the new variety.

So Florence is now bringing the design intelligentsia to the city for reasons other than seeing “David.” In an interview in-field this summer at Pitti, Neilson, a 31-year-old footwear designer from Amsterdam working for Vans, mentioned how the Pitti Immagine is an important event for both small and large companies as it is now the largest clothing tradeshow in Europe. Establishing

a presence in Europe through the Pitti Immagine is an important goal for all the companies present. The other Vans representatives that he was with were from places such as Spain and Austria, among other countries. By having representatives from different parts of Europe, they could communicate more effectively to different members of the diverse crowd (Karimi & Pante, Interview 1, June 28, 2008). This is classic agglomeration growing.

2. Collaborating with Clients in Close Proximity

Another important aspect about the Pitti Immagine is that it provides a space for knowledge workers to collaborate with clients. Maria, a 27-year-old marketing coordinator from Venice working for Lee Jeans Europe, stated that the Pitti Immagine is primarily for establishing new clients (Karimi & Pante, Interview 2, June 28, 2008). Her job at the event was to not only show clients (shop owners) their upcoming collections, in hopes of getting their brand in the owners' stores, but also to get their ideas of what they expect to see in future collections and what recent trends they have been seeing from throughout the industry.

3. Attracting More Talent

The Pitti Immagine has, in recent years, been attracting firms that not only produce clothing, but also bring new perspectives and directions for fashion. For instance, one of the exhibition spaces at the 2008 Pitti Immagine Bimbo event was dedicated entirely to firms with an ethical and environmentally sustainable approach to fashion. There are also numerous non-fashion exhibits and ideas that permeate the event space. During our visit to the Pitti Immagine, we witnessed a bicycle art installation piece on the main grounds of the Fortezza— a collaboration between the Pitti and the ANCMA (Associazione Nazionale Ciclo Motociclo Accessori), as a way to highlight “environmentally sustainable mobility” and its importance to contemporary lifestyles and the creative culture. These are some examples of the Pitti expanding from just fashion to art, culture, and technology. But much more importantly, it exhibits Pitti as a culture reflecting back the urban needs, beliefs and values of the creative worker.

By having a large gathering space for knowledge and creative workers to agglomerate, the Pitti Immagine is supporting innovation in Florence. That's not to say that the Pitti alone can fuel innovation, but it certainly is helping to establish relationships among knowledge workers as well as drive new developments, signs of a system that encourages and supports innovation growth. For example, the Pitti Immagine has expanded over the past two decades to include cultural events (“Taste,” a cultural food fair that takes

place at the Stazione Leopolda) and design (“Pitti Living,” an event for home accessories) (Pitti Immagine, 2008). Cultural events such as these provide discourse opportunities and reinforce and support the possibility for “knowledge spillovers” and other mechanisms of agglomeration and innovation.



Pitti Immagine Bimbo, Summer 2008

Top Row: Entrance to the Fortezza da Basso; Vans exhibit

Bottom Row: Bicycle installation; entrance to the “Eco Ethic” exhibits

Milan: Fashion as an Environment for Socialization and Talent Attraction

Milan, like Florence, has a large exhibition space to house fashion events—FieraMilano. This exhibition hall was designed by Massimiliano Fuksas and opened in 2005 (Cochrane & Taylor, 2006). It hosts the MilanoVendeModa, or Milan Fashion Week, which, like the Pitti Immagine, allows fashion designers to display their collections and facilitate business relations.

But, large exhibition spaces and events for knowledge workers to cluster are not the only areas that are important for innovation to occur; public developments that encourage social interaction and attract outside knowledge workers are just as essential to the cycle of innovation. As Chiang stated, forward-looking regions that want to attract knowledge workers “see the environment as a source of economic competitiveness, quality-of-life, and talent attraction” (Chiang & Taylor, 2007, p.12). These types of cities have undertaken efforts to move to smart growth, for instance by cleaning up and reusing older industrial sites (Florida, 2005). A good example of this is the Corso Como area, a site that used to house an old printing plant and parking garage but, in the 1990s, turned into a series of multifunctional spaces that are used for shopping, eating, and socializing. It is no coincidence by extension that Milan’s huge-scale new development, the “Città della Moda”, or Fashion City, is rising from the ground mere blocks away, both connected to the rest of the city by the adjacent Garibaldi Train and Metro station.

Corso Como Now: An Environment to Socialize

The Corso Como area is currently a long pedestrian-only block of up-scale designer clothing stores, cafes, bookstores, small hotels and residences, and restaurants. In the late afternoon, the restaurants set up tables along the center of the block, creating a lively space where people can shop, eat, and relax. The walls of the buildings provide a barrier of sorts to shield the block from the noisy traffic and urban developments that are occurring in the surrounding area. These developments include new municipal buildings, a state-of-the-art green field park, and, at its heart, the Città della Moda (Menkes, 2004).

Corso Como in the Future: An Environment to Sustain and Attract

The development going on around Corso Como is part of the Garibaldi Repubblica plan, which is a regeneration plan to transform the city by 2009 (Menkes, 2004). The Città della Moda will include shops, hotel and residential apartments, a museum to archive great designers of the past, and a university campus. The Corso Como will act as a link between the Città della Moda and

the Isola district on the far side. These developments will no doubt bring local knowledge workers to the area, as well as act as an attraction for outside talent, in the future. Creative workers, as we know from Florida, demand such positive urban spaces. They are often coming from all over the world and can to some degree call their shots when in demand. Creative workers have more choices, and their needs are forming cities (see the 2008 paper by Brokenshire, Pierce and Taylor on this topic). Milan, which has long been known as a rather horrid “liveable” city, seems to be attempting to catch up in this regard. Agglomeration centers must do so, or risk losing the best in a given field to another creative city. Milan, if it does not do so, desperately risks losing all of the positive pull, momentum, and seemingly unshakeable attraction and “spillovers” that create new opportunities, as talented young designers still come from all over Italy and increasingly from all over Europe and the world. In our interviews with leading designers in Milan over the past five years, we have already begun to hear significant fears that this has already occurred, and significant doubt that the government-funded projects will make much of a difference. That said, for the purposes of this paper, there is little doubt that Corso Como and the Garibaldi area of Milan look to be forming itself into a new agglomeration center.



Corso Como, Summer 2008

Restaurants set up tables in the center of Corso Como, giving people the chance to unwind after shopping. The block is littered with clothing stores, book stores, cafes, restaurants, and more.

Corso Como



Garibaldi Repubblica Plan, 2009 (Planned)

The planned development of the area around Corso Como, including the Città della Moda .

By increasing the quality-of-life of an area, knowledge workers will be constantly energized which in turn can stimulate their creativity, creativity that is then fed back into their work and help fuel more innovation. This increased environment can also attract outside knowledge workers into the area, who then also fuel innovation. In the future, when the Città della Moda and the Garibaldi Repubblica regeneration plan are complete, the Corso Como area may truly be able to sustain current knowledge workers and attract new talent.

Conclusion

The fashion industry itself does not drive innovation in Italy; what it does is play key roles in Italy's overall innovation. From our observations in-field, we have seen the contemporary fashion industry increase opportunities for knowledge exchange through agglomerations (Pitti Immagine in Florence) and opportunities for current and future interactions (Corso Como and surrounding developments in Milan). Well-supported agglomerations and an open, accessible environment are important elements in the cycle of innovation within a city, and without these elements in place, new innovations like the planned Città della Moda would not be created.

The research, observations, interviews, and findings regarding Italian fashion from the 2008 Italia Design team will hopefully serve as a foundation for future Italia teams, just as Heather Chiang's work served as a foundation for us. The studies conducted in 2008 were just a tip of the iceberg. Perhaps Italian Fashion and icebergs don't belong in the same sentence together, but that is the point our research has gotten to thus far. In any case, we will continue to evolve this topic as we watch with interest what happens to both agglomeration centers in Milan and Florence. Specific areas that we need to evolve in future studies include:

- + new exhibitions at the Pitti Immagine, and whether the Pitti can sustain innovation in Florence
- + the status of the Città della Moda in Milan
- + the ties between the fashion, publishing, and architecture industries in Milan
- + the importance of the Golden Quad district in Milan

By looking at Italian innovation through this lens, we gain a new appreciation for the power of Italian quality as a basis of design. Given how increasingly difficult it has become for Italian companies to differentiate with global competition for design, there is some certainty in the belief that no one will ever be able to do beautiful quality things like Italy.

There is but one Armani.

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