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The business of fashion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries



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ABSTRACT

Fashion is a complex social and cultural phenomenon with strong economic implications. Historical analysis reveals that the mechanisms of creating and spreading fashion have not remained constant, but have varied according to social structures, forms of producing and distributing apparel and social media, while the level of influence of fashion on society has increased in line with economic development. This special issue of *Investigaciones de Historia Económica-Economic History Research* is dedicated to fashion as an economic phenomenon in the contemporary period. The four articles which make it up show the plurality of the subject areas, sources and methodological approaches in the current research on this topic.

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RESUMEN

La moda es un fenómeno social y cultural complejo, con fuertes implicaciones económicas. El análisis histórico revela que los mecanismos de creación y difusión de la moda no han permanecido constantes, sino que han ido variando conforme lo hacían las estructuras sociales, las formas de producción y distribución de la indumentaria, y los medios de comunicación social, al igual que el grado de influencia de la moda sobre la sociedad ha ido incrementándose con el desarrollo económico. Este número monográfico de *Investigaciones de Historia Económica-Economic History Research* está dedicado a la moda como fenómeno económico en el período contemporáneo. Los cuatro artículos que lo componen muestran la pluralidad de materias de estudio, fuentes y enfoques metodológicos de la actual investigación sobre el tema.

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1. Fashion and History

This special issue of *Investigaciones de Historia Económica-Economic History Research* is dedicated to the fashion industry of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The four articles included in this number were sent to the journal in response to an open call for papers and were selected according to the interest of their

contributions and also so as to reflect the diversity of themes and approaches currently used in this field of research. Fashion is a complex social and cultural phenomenon with strong economic implications. It affects a wide variety of consumption decisions (Błaszczuk, 2008a), but historically its influence has been most appreciable in clothes and personal adornment. In this specific field, fashion could be defined as a culturally endorsed style of aesthetic expression in dress and adornment, which characterises a social group in a determined period and which changes over time (Sproles, 1974). This cultural phenomenon has become big business. The global apparel market is estimated to move almost

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1.5 trillion euros each year. Textile and clothing industries employ more than 25 million workers across the world (if we add those employed in related services, this figure increases to 75 million), and the annual value of exports of these industries exceeds five billion euros.¹ Furthermore, a good number of those in the exclusive list of the richest people in the world are entrepreneurs in the fashion industry, such as the Spanish-born Amancio Ortega (who, according to Forbes magazine, thanks to Inditex has the second largest fortune in the world, valued at 67 billion dollars), the Frenchman Bernard Arnault (chairman of the LVMH group, who is ranked 14 among the largest fortunes in the world with 34 billion dollars) and the Swede Stefan Persson (of the Hennes & Mauritz group, in 32nd position with almost 2 billion dollars)².

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the German philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel defined fashion as a form of imitation and social equalisation, but, paradoxically, in changing incessantly it differentiates one time from another and one social stratum from another. It unites those of a social class and segregates them from others (Simmel, 1904). For Simmel, therefore, fashion is the result of two opposing trends which coexist in the social condition of the human being: first, the search for social integration through imitation and second the desire for individual differentiation. In his opinion, the elite classes create fashion trends, which are imitated by the lower classes and the process of change is activated when the elite classes abandon a particular fashion when it becomes universally adopted and new trends take its place. Thorstein Veblen, the American sociologist and economist, also commented that the upper classes came up with a new fashion and for them it was a way of reaffirming their position in the social structure, while this fashion was spread down to the lower classes through imitation (Veblen, 1899).

From the second half of the twentieth century, this trickle-down theory in the spread of fashion from the upper classes to the lower classes has been updated by different authors. In this new version, those who are at the top of the system and have the power to influence consumers in general are agents who form part of the fashion system, such as designers and retailers, and others who, for different reasons (specialised journalists, celebrities...) are opinion leaders (McCracken, 1986). However, other theories on fashion see this as a less hierarchical process. One of the most well known is the theory of the American sociologist Herbert Blumer, for who fashion is a process of collective selection, the reflection of the majority taste of society, a collective taste which develops among people who interact and have lived similar experiences. From this perspective, fashion always reflects the spirit of each age and there is a historical continuity in fashion, as the new trends emerge from their predecessors. The fashion elite does not create the collective taste but identifies it and adjusts its creations to it; it is precisely its capacity to identify the collective taste which makes it the fashion elite (Blumer, 1969).

In reality, a historical analysis reveals that the mechanisms of creating and spreading fashion have not remained constant, but have varied according to social structures, forms of producing and distributing apparel and social media. Fashion styles are products of a specific time and are determined not only by aesthetic trends but also by the production techniques and market conditions of each time (Muzzarelli, 2010, p. 9). The way in which these styles have been created and spread have adjusted to the characteristics of the society in which they have taken place. Fashion therefore, is a historical phenomenon, with a series of characteristics which have modified over time, and its level of influence on society has

increased in line with economic development and the increase in the consumption capacity of the population.

As an aesthetic, social and cultural phenomenon, fashion has received considerable attention from historians, not only in the study of the contemporary era, but also, or even more so, in the context of previous centuries. As Regina Blaszczyk comments (2008a, p. 5), “over the past thirty years, fashion history pioneers have broached territory often dismissed as ‘frivolous’ by the academy”. In addition to the excellent studies on the evolution of fashion in the West from the Middle Ages (Beward, 1995; Colomer and Descalzo, 2014; Frick, 2002; Heller, 2007; Lipovetsky, 1990; Riello, 2012; Stuard, 2006), many studies have been carried out on the same phenomenon in Asia (Finnane, 2008; Quataert, 1997; Slade, 2009; Steele and Major, 1999) and other continents (Earle, 2001, 2003; Root, 2005; Valentín, 2009) and on the influence of Asia on European fashion (Ferreira, 2015; Riello and Lemire, 2008; Styles, 2011), not to mention the in-depth analyses of the development of haute-couture from the nineteenth century, the style of dress in the twentieth century (English, 2007; Horwood, 2005; Muzzarelli, 2011; Romani, 2015; Stanfill, 2015; Steele, 1997, 1998, 2003) and the leading fashion designers (Braun, 2015; Frisa and Tonchi, 2010; Gnoli, 2005; Polan and Tredre, 2009; Troy, 2015; Vaquero, 2007). It is impossible to list even a small part of the many relevant publications in this field. Until the 1980s, the interest focused mainly on the stylistic evolution of clothing. From then, a more multidisciplinary approach was adopted, highly influenced by the fields of psychology and anthropology, which are now focusing to an increasingly greater extent on the recent past (Muzzarelli et al., 2010, p. 3).

However, the study of fashion as an economic phenomenon with a particular influence on the historical evolution of many industries has received less attention, at least until the beginning of the twenty-first century (Blaszczyk, 2008a, p. 9; Friedman and Jones, 2011, p. 238). Of course, there have been an abundance of studies dating back many years on the production, trade and consumption of fabrics and clothing (Blanc, 2010, p. 20), but the majority of them have ignored the phenomenon of fashion or have not considered the inter-dependence of fashion with industrial and commercial organisation. The historical analysis of fashion as an economic phenomenon has been based mainly on an approach close to business history, although highly influenced by other disciplines such as cultural history. In addition to examining the historical origin of fashion and its manifestations in the pre-industrial period (Belfanti, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Richardson et al., 2003; Raveux, 2014; Riello, 2006) and the evolution of the apparel sector in Great Britain from the nineteenth century (Anderson, 2006; Godley, 2003; Godley et al., 2003; Honeyman, 2003; Riello, 2003; Ugolini, 2003, 2007), these studies have focused on three fields of research particularly prolific in the Contemporary Age: the development of haute-couture and the luxury industry in France from the mid nineteenth century (Blay, 2005; Brachet, 2012; Donzé and Fujioka, 2015; Font, 2012; Maillat, 2009; Okawa, 2007; Pouillard, 2011, 2013, 2015), the formation of a fashion system in the United States from the first third of the twentieth century (Arnold, 2009; Blaszczyk, 2008b; Clemente, 2007, 2014; Schweitzer, 2008; Welters and Cunningham, 2005) and the conversion of Italy into a new world leader in fashion during the second half of the twentieth century (Belfanti, 2015; Capalbo, 2008; Colli and Merlo, 2007; Fontana, 2008; Merlo, 2003a, 2003b, 2011, 2015; Merlo and Polese, 2006, 2008a, 2008b; Paris, 2006, 2010; Pinchera, 2008; White, 2000). The four articles composing this monographic issue on the fashion business of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are dedicated to these three fields. The study carried out by Véronique Pouillard analyses the activity developed by a key institution in the French fashion industry, la *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture*, during the inter-war period. Stephanie Amerian's article focuses on some of the initiatives that were fundamental in shaping the United State's own

¹ Data from FashionUnited (<https://www.fashionunited.com/global-fashion-industry-statistics-international-apparel>).

² <http://www.forbes.com/billionaires>.

fashion style. Cinzia Calpalbo describes how the Italian fashion system was formed during the inter-war period and finally, Carlo Marco Belfanti and Elisabetta Merlo examine the innovative capacity of one of the leading “Made in Italy” firms in the footwear sector, Salvatore Ferragamo.

2. French *haute couture*

The fashion phenomenon began to emerge fully in Europe from the fourteenth century, when a clear distinction between men’s and women’s clothing became consolidated and when the upper classes began to change their style of dress frequently. In the eighteenth century, with the so-called “consumption revolution”, the social spectrum influenced by fashion widened and, with the industrial revolution, it became an industry. However, modern fashion, as we understand it today, with its rhythmic succession of new styles and its high aesthetic and economic importance was not configured until the second half of the nineteenth century, with French *haute couture*.³

In the mid nineteenth century, Charles Frederick Worth was the first to establish an *haute couture* house in Paris. It had the basic features that would characterise this system of fashion production for a whole century. The *couturier* was considered as an artist, a fashion designer who constantly innovated and signed his creations. The clothing collections were periodically renewed and were presented in public through mannequin parades. The garments were custom made with high quality materials and therefore had very high prices and could only be afforded by a small minority of society. However, some of the designs were also sold to be reproduced with less expensive materials and more affordable prices, and therefore the fashion reached a wider market. Furthermore, the trends launched by the *haute couture* designers were sooner or later imitated by the industrial clothing sector.

The industry experienced intense growth and acquired great importance within the French economy in the period between the two world wars, but it continued to be made up largely of small and medium-sized firms based on hand-made production. It was extraordinarily concentrated in Paris due to the association with fashion and the resulting prestige that the city had obtained and the external economies generated there by the initial location of fashion production. However, these strong local roots did not prevent the fashion created in Paris from having an international impact. Its designs were spread throughout the world and the industry became a prominent component of French exports.

In order to defend the interests of the new sector, in 1868 the *Chambre Syndicale de la Confection et de la Mode* was created, which later, in 1910, became known as the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture*. This organisation established a rigid regulation of the *haute couture* industry with the objective of protecting its prestige. Véronique Pouillard’s article examines the actions of this institution during the inter-war period, drawing data mainly from the minutes of its meetings. Pouillard describes the internal organisation of the *Chambre* and places it in the context of the different business associations which structured the fashion sector in France. What is particularly surprising is that, although not all of the *haute couture* houses formed part of the institution and only producers of very high quality garments were accepted as members, the *Chambre* had 140 members before the outbreak of the Second World War.

The article highlights the activity developed by the *Chambre* in five areas: the education of the workforce, the diffusion of information between members regarding common problems, propaganda,

negotiation with the authorities and the protection of intellectual property. The education of the workers was a constant concern of the business association, which believed that a highly qualified workforce was essential in such a craft-based sector. In 1921, the *Chambre* established a fund to finance half of the cost of the professional training of apprentices, while the *haute couture* houses paid the other half and in 1931 it opened two of its own professional schools. Furthermore, several *haute couture* houses offered grants and internships in their installations to the best students.

Pouillard points out that another essential function of the association was the distribution of information among its members about the social policies of the French government and other issues of interest for the companies, such as exterior markets, customs and tariff rates, currency exchange, the lists of defaulters and counterfeiters and debt collection. This was complemented by propaganda activities ranging from the organisation of exhibitions in other countries and visits of foreign guests to the *Chambre Syndicale* to the defence of *haute couture* as an essential industry for France. The association also performed lobbying functions, pressuring the public authorities to prevent the rents of business premises from increasing, to reduce the luxury tax and to protect the intellectual property rights of the *haute couture* houses. In fact, the *Chambre* actively worked to avoid the copy of models. First, it carefully selected who (journalists, corporate buyers and private clients) could access the fashion shows. Second, it prioritised the sales to external markets, promoting the creation of a national brand to reinforce the French identity of *haute couture* and banning department stores and French clothing manufacturers from entering the *haute couture* houses. Third, in 1921 it created its own legal defence service to protect against the copy of models and to advise its members in the search of lawyers for these cases. Finally, it proposed a new law to the French parliament (the Fabry law) to protect against design piracy. Furthermore, the *Chambre* played a very important role in the coordination of the personnel policies of its members, in order to foster stability in the workforce and avoid the loss of human capital and the filtration of the unique techniques of each firm. Véronique Pouillard concludes that the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture* was not a cartel, but it enabled its members to share information and implement common policies. However, this coordination only took place on a business administration level. The association never constituted a platform through which to agree on trends in terms of style and colour or to address other creative aspects of the industry.

3. North American fashion

Almost on a par with the development of *haute couture*, from the second third of the nineteenth century the clothing industry in other European countries and particularly in the United States began to experience growth. The American fashion sector was initially boosted by the mechanisation of textile production which made it possible to lower the prices of fabrics, but, unlike this industry, the clothing industry was not mechanised until the end of the nineteenth century. Instead of being concentrated in factories, most of the work was carried out in the homes of the workers, mainly women who worked long hours for low wages and under sweating system conditions. These clothes were sold to the working classes and almost exclusively to men, whose simple and homogeneous way of dressing was easier to adapt to mass production. The quality of the clothes improved over time, which, together with the increase in the purchasing power of the working class population, led to an increase in consumption which was facilitated by the distribution in department stores, especially in the more economically advanced countries and among the populations of the cities which is where production was usually concentrated. In France, the sector was mainly based in Paris, while in Great Britain it was concentrated

³ The contextualisation of the articles in this monographic issue within the evolution experienced by the fashion industry is based on Miranda (2014).

in London and to a lesser extent, in Leeds. In the United States, the industry was mainly concentrated in New York but there were also other important clothes production centres in other cities such as Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago and Saint Louis.

The demand for these types of garments grew the fastest and extended among the different social sectors first in the United States. At the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of the American male population used mass-produced clothing and from the beginning of the following century this type of clothing began to be worn by women. However, at the beginning of the 1920s, the United States still did not have its own female fashion industry. The market segments with the highest purchasing power imported French models or acquired clothes that were made following or imitating the Paris designs while the industrially produced clothing imitated the trends launched by the French *haute couture* to the best of its ability.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, different proposals were made so that the American fashion industry could break its dependency on Paris, but it was during the 1920s and 1930s when this type of initiative had a greater impact and led to the forging of a style characteristic of the United States. The German occupation of Paris during the Second World War interrupted the flow of French fashion across the Atlantic and decisively contributed to the consolidation of this new fashion industry. Stephanie Amerian's article studies some of the initiatives that were most decisive in kick-starting the creation of an American fashion style, namely those promoted by Dorothy Shaver in the Lord & Taylor department stores.

Shaver was a successful business woman who worked for almost four decades, from 1921, in the luxury Lord & Taylor department store in New York of which she became president in 1945. Amerian reveals that, from her position in the department store, Shaver was committed to associating the creation of a stylistically independent American fashion industry with the new artistic trends that were being developed in the inter-war period. Instead of trying to base the American style on the landscape or traditional culture, as other initiatives had done, Shaver identified the character of the United States with contemporary art and developed a functional fashion adapted to the increasingly active life of North American women. Her proposal combined beauty with efficient mass production in order to democratise the consumption of fashion clothes to make them accessible to the majority of the population.

Amerian underlines the importance of three promotional campaigns organised by Shaver: the modern decorative art fair of 1928, the promotion of North American designers, starting in 1923, and the "American Look" campaign which was implemented in 1945. The first of these initiatives was a large French decorative modern art exhibition in Lord & Taylor, with the objective of advertising a new modern decoration department in the department store. This exhibition connected Shaver with the North American community of designers. It gave her prestige as an expert in avant-garde artistic styles and showed that she was able to use cultural activities as advertising instruments. Shaver saw a clear business opportunity in incorporating modern art into industrial design, introducing interior decoration and clothes. In her opinion, blending *Art Nouveau* with American industry would generate the style characteristic of the twentieth century that would convert New York into one of the world's fashion capitals.

The second large advertising initiative organised by Shaver was called "American fashions for American women" and began in 1932 in the throes of economic depression. The main objective was to relaunch clothing sales in Lord & Taylor, but it also sought to consolidate the reputation of this department store as a leader of modern American design. The operation consisted in promoting North American clothes designers, mass producing and selling several models of each of them, together with advertising support

through window displays, advertisements in newspapers and fashion magazines and even the organisation of meetings between the clients and the designers. The campaigns were directed mainly at young women who were offered comfortable clothes able to adapt to different activities and levels of social formality. The use of fabrics that were not excessively expensive, such as wool or cotton meant that much of this clothing could be sold at very moderate prices. These campaigns to promote national designers were carried out for many years and were imitated by other department stores and by the American press specialised in fashion. In 1937, Lord & Taylor supported them with the creation of an award to the best American designer.

The third activity highlighted by Amerian was the "American Look" campaign, undertaken at the end of the Second World War. This time, the campaign did not promote specific designers but the concept of American fashion in general, with clothes designed for the active woman. The designers participating in the campaign included Claire McCardell, whose comfortable and versatile clothing was the antithesis of the "New Look" style with which Christian Dior was reviving French *haute couture*.

Stephanie Amerian's article highlights the important role played by the department stores, such as Lord & Taylor, in the development of the fashion industry in the United States. But the department stores were also key players in the fashion business in Europe. One of them, La Rinascente, was particularly important in Milan's conversion into a major world fashion centre.

4. Made in Italy

The intense social change experienced by western countries in the 1960s gave rise to a democratisation of fashion, and new sectors of society began to partake in this type of consumption, particularly young people, but also men, working women, and in general, the middle classes. Not only did the demand for fashion increase, but this demand changed, favouring products with lower prices and with a different symbolic weight. From the 1960s, *haute couture* was no longer the main source of fashion; it had been overtaken by the *prêt-à-porter* industry which merged fashion with industrial production by mass producing clothes with standardised sizes, but with a high level of quality and a carefully studied design in line with the fashion trends.

In London, the clothing industry had not been traditionally innovative and was only known for its high quality men's clothing. However, in the 1960s it became a pioneer centre for new trends, thanks to the "Swinging London" cultural movement which was reflected in fashion with an innovative, young and informal style. The youth of London had a purchasing power that was much higher than ever before. This gave rise to a huge increase in the number of boutiques selling this type of clothing around Carnaby Street and King's Road and designers, such as Mary Quant who created the mini skirt, became known internationally. In this way, the British capital became another world fashion capital and would continue to be identified with the most innovative trends throughout the subsequent decades. From the end of the 1960s and particularly during the beginning of the 1970s, a series of new designers emerged in New York who launched strong clothing brands that were industrially produced and defined a contemporary American style characterised by the search for informal elegance. However, it was in Italy where the *prêt-à-porter* industry developed most from the 1970s, with Milan being its principal centre.

Italian-produced fashion became internationally renowned from the 1950s, thanks to different promotional activities which showcased the huge potential of Italy's designers and industry to foreign markets. In the 1950s, Italy produced clothes and complements using high quality materials and techniques, with an attractive and differentiated design, and with a price that was

lower than French *haute couture*. Italian fashion adapted better than the *haute couture* of Paris to the tastes of the principal importing market, the United States, as it was more functional and comfortable. It was launched internationally through the organisation of the Italian High Fashion Shows in Florence from 1951, which imitated the French *haute couture* shows and attracted sales agents from the large American department stores and the international press specialised in fashion. The event was supported by the large Italian textile companies which became the main sponsors of the fashion shows and which participated in the creation of the *Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana* in 1954, the body which thereafter became the organiser of the Florence Fashion Show from then on. This event, and other promotional activities, coincided with significant technical and organisational improvements in the different fashion producing sectors of Italy. These industries also developed a remarkable capacity to offer a wide variety of designs and constantly renew them. As a result, the Italian exports of fashion items grew at an impressive rate from the 1950s.

Despite the success of the Florence fashion shows, Italy's *haute couture* industry preferred to keep its principal base in Rome. Some of the most important fashion houses of this city stopped attending the Florence fair after 1952 and the following year created the *Sindacato Italiano Alta Moda*, in order to organise their own fashion shows in the country's capital. In 1958, the *Camera Sindacale della Moda Italiana* was also established in Rome, imitating the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*, which was replaced by the *Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana* in 1962. However, the demand for *haute couture* began to fall rapidly after the 1960s due to changes in society and consumption patterns. Consequently, in the 1970s, many designers closed their workshops, while others used the *haute couture* models simply to promote their *prêt-à-porter* collections. As a result, Rome did not succeed in becoming the country's fashion capital.

The rise in per capita income in Italy, together with the social and cultural changes, led to a remarkable increase in the consumption of clothing by the general population which was largely manufactured industrially. This increase in domestic demand also generated a reinforcement of the clothing industry and some of the largest textile companies began to manufacture clothing, create their own brands and invest in establishing their own distribution channels. The sector was mostly concentrated in the province of Turin and this city acquired the status of the leading centre of mass-produced clothing in Italy thanks to the creation of the *Salone Mercato Internazionale dell'Abbigliamento* (SAMIA) in 1954. The SAMIA brought domestic and foreign buyers and distributors together with the producers of clothing items and knitted goods, footwear and accessories; in the mid 1960s it constituted one of the most important trade fairs of the mass-produced clothing industries in Europe. However, the SAMIA began to lose steam from the beginning of the 1970s and with it Turin's leadership of industrially produced fashion also waned. This was due partly to the evolution of the market, as demand was shifting towards higher quality products while the supply of more basic garments began to suffer from the effects of the fierce competition of the imports from emerging countries.

Milan was the city where the Italian fashion industry became consolidated. Milan had a large textile and clothing industry and a rich tradition in *haute couture* characterised by a more sober style than that of the firms in Rome. Milan also had a good supply of financial, legal and commercial services, training centres, advertising agencies, publishers and press specialised in fashion. There was also a group of institutions in the city that promoted the commercial development of companies in the textile-clothing sector. One of these institutions was the *Centro Italiano della Moda*, which promoted the creation of the *Mercato Internazionale del Tessile per l'Abbigliamento e l'Arredamento* (MITAM) in 1957. The MITAM established Milan as the principal point of reference for textile

production in Italy, but it also acted as an instrument to facilitate the coordination of the textile and clothing industries.

As we have already mentioned, another of the agents that boosted the development of the fashion industry in Milan during the 1950s and 1960s was *La Rinascente*. The Milanese department store for which designers such as Luis Hidalgo, Pierre Cardin and Valentino worked, not only contributed to the promotion of Italian production abroad by participating in fairs held in the United States, but principally promoted the production of designer *prêt-à-porter* clothing for the medium-high classes and constituted a training centre for designers in the management and sales aspects of the fashion world.

Thanks to the network of industries, services and institutions formed during the previous decades, Milan was able to benefit from the changes occurring in the world consumption of clothing items to a greater extent than the rest of the Italian fashion centres. Based on collaboration between the industrial companies and the designers, it specialised in a type of *avant-garde prêt-a-porter* which very quickly conquered international markets and placed it as the leading city for Italian fashion and as a world fashion capital. The development of *prêt-a-porter* was carried out through close collaboration between the textile industry, the clothing industry and the fashion designers, giving rise to an effective fashion system.

Cinzia Capalbo's article suggests that the construction of this Italian fashion system had begun during the inter-war years, thanks to the unique economic, institutional and cultural conditions of the period. Using the fashion magazines published in Italy during the fascist period as its principal source, the article defends that the attempts to create an independent Italian fashion industry from the beginning of the twentieth century intensified during the fascist period, and this industry made a significant contribution to the construction of Italy's national identity. Capalbo also maintains that Mussolini's autarchic policy obstructed the purchase of fashion items from abroad and led to a shortage of imported raw materials which stimulated the search for substitutes and innovation in the textile and other fashion industries. Furthermore, the author also believes that the futurist cultural movement fuelled interest in Italian fashion and contributed to the development of an innovative design in this field.

The article reviews the different initiatives undertaken in Italy from the beginning of the twentieth century to create a fashion style that was independent from Paris. Some of them, such as those of the designers Rosa Genoni, Mariano Fortuny and Maria Monaci Gallenga, aroused a certain degree of international interest but not enough to change the principal trend in the Italian fashion market, which continued to import and reproduce the French designs for women while the tailors continued to use the models from London as a reference for men's clothing. According to Capalbo, the situation began to change with the shift towards protectionism in trade policy in 1926, which intensified with the crisis of 1929 and the economic sanctions imposed on Italy in 1935 following its invasion of Ethiopia.

In the 1930s, the autarchic context decisively pushed the fascist regime to create an Italian fashion industry. With this objective, in 1933 the first National Exhibition of Fashion was organised in Turin, which was replaced in 1935 by the *Ente Nazionale della Moda*, which was granted extensive powers of control over the sector. In addition to the creation of this institution, measures were implemented to develop the national production of textile fibres to avoid dependency on imports. The most important were the stimuli for manufacturing substitute materials and particularly synthetic fibres. The companies producing rayon and other synthetic fibres multiplied their output and not only supplied the domestic market but also exported a large volume, while imports of wool and cotton were halved during the 1930s. In order to stimulate the consumption of garments made with the new textile fibres, the large

companies in the sector, including Snia-Viscosa, developed intense advertising campaigns.

The use of fabrics manufactured with artificial fibres was the principal new feature introduced into women's clothing by the Italian designers. In the 1930s, some of these designers created their own style, free from the French influence. Of these designers, Capalbo highlights the role played by Carla Tizzoni, Germana Marucelli and Ventura, in Milan, and the Botta sisters, Giovanni Montorsi and Nicola Zecca, in Rome. This Italian fashion industry was backed strongly by the women's magazines published in the country, particularly after 1937, when, in response to the balance of payments problems, a government campaign was implemented to reduce the imports of luxury goods and these publications began to feature only Italian designers. In the 1930s, the specialised magazines also began to promote the development of a men's fashion that was independent from the British style. This fashion was principally characterised by the search of more practical clothes and gave rise to different attempts to innovate, particularly in jackets. New brighter and more cheerful colours were also introduced with the support of the futurist movement.

For Capalbo, Italy's principal contribution to women's fashion during the autarchy was mainly in accessories, where the experimentation with new materials coincided with the design of articles for mass production. By this time, the creativity of the Italian producers had reached foreign markets in leather products. This constituted a foretaste of the expansion of the Made in Italy brand which began in the 1950s. In the manufacture of bags, suitcases and small leather articles, Gucci, which was based in Florence, introduced innovative materials such as jute, hemp or bamboo and began selling its products all around the world. In footwear, the creativity of Salvatore Ferragamo stood out. This brand was also established in Florence to supply mainly the North American market.

The article that closes this special issue, written by Carlo Marco Belfanti and Elisabetta Merlo, is precisely about Salvatore Ferragamo. The authors have used the patent records of Italy and the United States to analyse the innovations in models, components and manufacturing systems of footwear patented by Salvador Ferragamo between 1929 and 1960. The objective of the article is to contribute to providing a better understanding of the product innovation processes in the footwear industry and the role played by the patents in the development of the Italian fashion industry.

The article begins with a reconstruction of the international panorama of the footwear industry from the end of the nineteenth century until the mid twentieth century, which underlies the rapid mechanisation of the sector and the product innovations carried out to convert footwear into a mass consumption good. This section is followed by a review of the legal regulations regarding patents in Italy and the description of the database constructed by the authors which includes all of the patents associated to footwear, clothes and accessories recorded in the country between 1900 and 1970. This database shows that the footwear was the industry that received the highest amount of patents within this group, many of them registered by companies in the traditional footwear clusters of the country, which, in the opinion of Belfanti and Merlo, suggests that "industrialization and sectorial specialization have been sourced from patenting inventiveness".

Salvatore Ferragamo registered the most footwear patents, many more than the rest of the designers. Ferragamo, who eventually established one of the most reputable footwear brands in the world market, began in the industry in 1909 as an apprentice shoemaker in Naples. At the age of fourteen he emigrated to the United States and almost ten years later he opened his first footwear workshop in Hollywood, where he worked for the film industry and soon earned an excellent reputation as a footwear designer. In order to extend his production, he returned to Italy

in search of a qualified workforce and established his company in Florence, which was one of the principal centres of the Italian footwear industry at the end of the 1920s. There, he adapted the handmade techniques in footwear to the modern production methods that he had learnt in the United States and began to design innovations which he registered as patents. Initially, at the end of the 1920s they corresponded to orthopaedic instruments, but later, as from the 1930s, they constituted new footwear models.

Ferragamo registered almost a thousand patents in Italy between 1929 and 1960, but only a few in the United States. Many of the patents registered in Italy in the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s responded to the scarcity of leather, which led Ferragamo to use substitute materials, such as cork or raffia, but the number of inventions grew even more after the Second World War. From the analysis of the American patents, Belfanti and Merlo deduce that the objective of patenting innovations was not to protect the inventor against copies, or to increase the economic value of the models patented, but to confirm the high status of the products, and therefore, intensify the interest of purchasers in them. There were two reasons for the large number of Italian patents: first, to bestow the designer with the status of a fashion creator; and second, to facilitate the manufacture of the models on an industrial scale and under licence. In conclusion, for Belfanti and Merlo, Ferragamo was a pioneer among the Italian designers who started developing *ready-to-wear* collections in the 1970s, as, like them, he designed high quality and carefully designed products to be produced industrially.

As we indicated at the beginning of this introduction, the four articles which make up this special issue show the plurality of the subject areas, sources and methodological approaches in the current research on the business history of fashion. Véronique Pouillard analyses a key institution in the business organisation of the fashion industry in France, using the internal documents of this institution. Stephanie Amerian examines the role played by the intermediaries between the fashion designers and consumers, and their ability to shape the tastes of consumers and generate fashion trends. Her research is based on the private documents of an essential figure in the fashion system of the United States. Cinzia Capalbo shows the importance of the historical context, in cultural, political and economic terms, for the evolution of the fashion industry, using the specialised press during the inter-war period as her main source. Carlo Marco Belfanti and Elisabetta Merlo analyse the product innovation process and its connections with marketing in a leading fashion company, using patent records as their principal source.

This diversity indicates that the fashion world is an extraordinarily rich field for economic and business historians. It is true that most of the research with this perspective and in this field until now has concentrated on a few countries, but this does not mean that the research in other cases is not relevant. With respect to Spain and Latin America, the studies on the historical evolution of fashion as an economic phenomenon are still not highly developed. However, some publications have had a significant international impact, particularly in the case of Spain which has become one of the leading countries in low cost fashion in recent decades (Alonso, 2000, 2011, 2012; Carmona, 2012; Manera and Garau-Taberner, 2012). Undoubtedly, there is an enormous range of possibilities. We hope that this special issue of *Investigaciones de Historia Económica-Economic History Research* encourages researchers to take advantage of them.

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