

Fashion market in the context of sustainable development

Apart from the issues of environmental protection and responsible use of natural resources, broadly understood, present day concept of sustainable development also includes concern for human rights, well-being, good level and quality of life of local communities, respect for cultural uniqueness and diversity, creative use of traditional skills and cultural patterns, good working conditions, stable and fair economic relations. From the perspective of sustainable development design, production and consumption of clothing and apparel, in particular garments used by individual consumers who purchase them according to personal tastes and considerations (i.e. clothing understood as fashion), is one of important areas of growing interest of both academics and participants in the market. Different variations of this phenomenon referred to as 'sustainable fashion' include – design and production of clothing using ecological textiles (e.g. organic cotton) (termed eco fashion, organic fashion or green fashion), recycling and upcycling of clothing, the issue of ecologically friendly technologies of production (e.g. reducing chemical pollution and textile waste) (zero-waste fashion), taking into consideration the fair share of profits and proper income level of workers engaged in the fashion production process, appropriate working and safety conditions (fair trade, ethical fashion, CSR), limiting clothing consumption thanks to more thought-out purchases, second-hand and vintage purchases, taking into account durability and flexibility of use, mending, sharing, swapping, circulation and donation of clothing (slow fashion, collaborative fashion consumption), taking ecological issues into account in day-to-day clothing maintenance (laundry, ironing), orientation towards local (domestic) production and consumption to some extent linked with ethnocentric attitudes, using local skills and traditions or heritage inspirations in design and production of clothing (ethnic design). Sustainable fashion practices may pertain to all participants in the fashion market and its diverse segments such as luxury fashion, mass-produced clothing and apparel or independent designers.

The aim of the project is to undertake a multidimensional, complex analysis of the functioning and spatial patterns of the sustainable fashion market in Poland. On the one hand, the supply side of the market will be considered, both large firms – major players in the Polish context, SMEs and independent designers. On the other hand, the demand side – diverse attitudes and behaviours of consumers will be examined. The issue of inclusion of sustainable fashion approaches in curriculums of schools offering fashion majors on postgraduate and university level will also be taken into account.

Although in recent years a growing number of initiatives linked with sustainable approaches to fashion might be observed, especially in major Polish cities (new brands, shops, events such as fairs and festivals) and certain aspects of the topic have been examined by researchers, so far there hasn't been a holistic, comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, including the issues of its diffusion and spatial contexts. The proposed project aims to fill in this research gap looking at the subject from the new perspective of socio-economic geography and regional economics, including and considering jointly all most important participants in the fashion market (designers, producers, consumers), taking into account issues such as: factors and mechanism of diffusion of sustainable approaches to fashion, the role of this segment of the fashion market in the processes of restructuring and adaptation of clothing and apparel industry as a traditional labour intensive industry, new cooperation networks and linkages between this industry and the creative sector, its impact on new consumption forms and spaces visible in Polish cities (e.g. new type of fashion boutiques, fairs, fashion events) as an alternative to main-stream shopping outlets (e.g. large shopping centres), the role of digital information technologies and media in shaping the phenomenon and impacting on spatial relations on the national and global level, including core-periphery relations at different spatial scales.

Critical review of existing conceptual frameworks, working out a unique, own approach to the study of sustainable fashion market and testing it in the specific national context, will allow the authors to provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of sustainable fashion, contribute to the scientific discourse on sustainable development, factors and conditions of diffusion of sustainable production and consumption practices as well as broader issues of circular economy, culturisation of contemporary economic activities and their spatiality.

In order to engage in an in-depth analysis of the topic diverse research methods will be used such as: interviews (with fashion designers, representatives of different size firms in the fashion sector, including SMEs, lecturers in fashion majors, representatives of professional organisations and NGOs), questionnaire surveys addressed to SMEs in the clothing and apparel industry and independent fashion designers, observation and visual methods, mapping of independent fashion outlets in selected cities, questionnaire surveys of visitors to fashion fairs and a CATI survey of the general public in Poland.