

Sustainable Consumption of Fashion Leisure Products: Wool Fabrics and Lifestyle

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Abstract

In the last years, society have witnessed positive and somewhat radical changes in the design and manufacture of fashion products, a result of the search for unique products, a growing environmental awareness, and a stricter legislation on social and environmentally sustainable conducts. These changes are having a decisive role in establishing new models of consumption and lifestyle trends focused on sustainable practices and an overall mindset transformation to approach life, as search of a healthier lifestyle and finding the right balance between work and leisure.

The current work discusses changes in lifestyle, the return to origins, the natural and organic products preferences, along with the growing of the fashion segment of "activewear". The tendency of activewear in everyday life has progressed into what has been described as a new trend called "Athleisure"; fabrics with natural fibres as wool can end to be, or even are already being used, as an option to meet the sustainable consumer ideologies and daily use expectations.

Conclusions go in line with previous studies and industry reports or trends analysis agencies, indicating a sustainable future for hybrid activewear, the "athleisure", where the preference for natural and organic fibres prevail. Although, this preference prevails not per se, because it is taking advantage of technological improvements in natural resources management and clean production processes, or in the incorporation at fibre composition (wool and blends) and finishes with multilayer lamination of fabrics and addition of functional membranes.

Keywords:

Lifestyle trends; Fashion design; Sustainability; Wool; Athleisure.

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Introduction

Following the central ideals of conscientiousness, sustainability or even "slow living", the way consumers choose clothes and what kind of clothes to buy is changing.

A review of central concepts in the literature related to fashion, design, sustainability, conscientiousness consumption and practices, are presented. Academic studies in these fields interception along with fashion industry recent developments are discussed, with the objective to identify future directions to the fashion industry, specifically in the wool industry (e.g. Brown, 2010; Fletcher, 2014; Minney, 2016; Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011; WGSN group Reports).

Designers have a crucial role in creating more opportunities for sustainable consumption and production (Parker and Dickson, 2014). The consciousness of the weight exerted by the textile industry and its global impact, makes the combination of two significant trends, activewear/athleisure and sustainability (with the use of natural fibres), the perfect solution according to the current consumption habits. Along with that, the slow living, slow fashion and the design for sustainability concepts, go in line with the design of clothes for athleisure.

The present research focus on wool based fabrics, though this natural fibre presents its challenges, at the processes level, particularly with the dependency on water, its dyeing processes and the end-of-life management. However, the technical potential with the development of laminating and the finishing of fabrics compose by wool fibre, can add value to fashion products, when aesthetic concerns in the construction of clothes enable the creation of new low-impact materials and products (Barnes, 2018).

Considering TexBoost project guidelines, and the growing search for healthier lifestyles and different life philosophies, which consumers can relate with, opportunities in the fashion business are emerging. A sustainable future, supported by hybrid activewear, where the preference for natural and organic fibres prevails, can be one of the paths to follow.

Key Concepts on Leisure Activities

Concepts as sportswear, athleisure and activewear, though they are now mentioned more often, but are concepts that have already been developed and are present in the history of fashion, since the nineteenth century, always influenced by the growth of the leisure activities.

Jean Patou was the first designer to development sportswear for women, especially to the tennis player Suzanne Lenglen. At the same time, Elsa Schiaparelli also named her first store in Paris "*Pour le sport*", because she wanted to dress the modern woman as she saw in the United States, the clothes don't need to be complicated but with moveable and functional parts, that can be

combined with each other. In the 60's, emerged a new generation of stylists who gave a personal stamp to sportswear, such Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren and Donna Karen. (Seeling, 2000)

In the 70's, the practice of sport and several exercises, as jogging became very popular. In which fashion wasted no time and quickly everyone had a running jacket, even those who didn't run. In the 80's, sportswear was already a stable fashion category, the designers and manufacturers create clothing for every sport. This coincides with the introduction of a new elastic fibre, the spandex, to give the clothing the elasticity necessary for the movement. (Frings, 2012)

Currently to ally sportswear and the activewear clothing, from matching workout sets to trendy ruffles and backless top-and-sports-bra combos, there's hardly been a shortage of stylish activewear options in last seasons (Lajiness, 2018). In which, this trend of healthier lifestyle support by leisure activities become athleisure to.

Athleisure is the choice of clothing for leisure but also for low-performance sports, is not only a social influence nowadays, where the lifestyle is dominated by healthier aspects in the consumer's life.

Consciousness Consumption

Fashion is one of the fastest changing sources of new ideas in contemporary visual culture (Anderson, 2005). The mass-market retailers are also directed towards up to sportswear businesses. The "exercise movement" and the need to stretch apparel have contributed to the growth of the fashion business. Many shoppers appreciate the clothing's versatility, as the ones that are suitable for gym or yoga activities, now can be used in many casual office or entertainment situations, primarily because these types of clothing become more stylish (Pasquarelli, 2011).

Longer-lasting materials in fashion products are often promoted as a strategy to increase resourcefulness and sustainability across this category of product. These gains depend on changed user behaviour and consumption patterns, which in fashion are influenced by social and experiential dimensions (Fletcher, 2012).

Based in slow living and consequently slow fashion, Clark (2008) presented three lines of reflection: the valuing of local resources and distributed economies; the transparent production systems with less intermediation between producer and consumer; and the sustainable and sensorial products. Combined with the challenge of how to extend the slow concept on a larger scale. Slow fashion is not an oxymoron. Instead it offers an approach for a more sustainable future, but one which also demands a redefinition of fashion that acknowledges the slow principles and practices.

Fletcher (2014), raises the slow concept in the fashion supply chain, defending that slow is about a shift from quantity to quality. In melding the slow movement's ideas with the global clothing industry, build a new vision for fashion in the era of sustainability, where pleasure and fashion are linked with awareness and responsibility. Slow fashion is all about choice, information, cultural diversity and identity.

As a result, the popularity of the segment, fans of fitness now have a wide range of options to choose from: apart from sports giants like Nike, Adidas and Reebok, niche brands and luxury multiplied to meet the demand for athleisure articles. Portugal Têxtil (2016) affirms that these new brands in the segment also offer technical fabrics but are distinguished by the strong bet on the aesthetics of the pieces. For example, Aeance has a unique, non-seasonal collection for use in both the gym and the city, and Tone It Up, the lifestyle and fitness brand, has created capsule collections with Bandier and P.E. Nation in a fusion of fashion and performance.

Lower Impact Fibres

Materials play an influential role in our current understanding of how fashion can contribute to world sustainability. A shift away from polyester to renewable and biodegradable fibres such as wool and those made from corn starch could also bring benefits, reducing our dependency on petrochemical products including oil (Fletcher, 2014).

In the case of natural fibres, as wool, of the wool cleaning process have a significant environmental impact by the energy and water resources that are used. Fletcher (2014) confirms that the process from raw textile fibre to finished fabric and final product draws on labour, energy, water and other resources and cumulatively makes for a high-impact sector. However, there are fibre alternatives between others the organic wool; sheep scab can be controlled only with certain injectable or pour-on preparations that minimise the use of chemicals, impacts on freshwater ecology, and downstream processing. While the market for organic wool is tiny, it is growing, given impetus by companies like Marks and Spencer, who as part of its 'Plan A' sustainability initiative is sourcing a range of more sustainable fibres, including organic wool. Organically grown wool fibre can now be processed in the UK into a fully licensed organic product, which requires each manufacturing stage to have separate organic accreditation (Fletcher, 2014).

In the textile fibre sector, there are many options for reducing the social and environmental impact of marketed products, but none of these options is entirely sustainable. Salcedo (2014), talks about ethical fashion for a more sustainable future and the importance of the choice of raw materials, incorporated into the process of garment design. According to the same author, there are design strategies for sustainability. Thinking about the disassembly of the piece: design for recycling; the creation emotional bonds; the social well-being; minimizing waste – design without waste; the durability of the piece; the role of the user – inform the consumer, reduce the need to wash;

increasing the useful life of the product – to design modifiable, multifunctional or reversible parts and the waste management. Related also to the manufacturing processes, dry processes, in particular, the manufacture and working conditions given to workers (salary, number of hours, working conditions) are also part of a more ethical fashion for a sustainable future. Correspondingly, Salcedo (2014) mentions that we should stop using the term "sustainable fibres" in order to use the term "lower impact fibre" will be the most correct.

Fletcher (2012) says that durability is user-based rather than product based, though played out in material form, in other words, this suggests that to promote greater resourcefulness and longevity of products in fashion, it is to clothing competency and the "craft of use" that we must turn our attention. For such processes recognise the social and experiential dimensions to fashion, which, facilitated by a fashion garment materials, design, and construction, influence how long clothing lasts.

Final Considerations

Athleisure fashion its part of the process of change to a healthier lifestyle chosen by the new consciousness consumers. Similarly, the future of the fashion and textile industry will depend on the reducing the environmental and social burden across the entire lifecycle of a garment.

Part of the industry future rely on the reduction of the impact associated with cultivating and producing all textile fibres and establishing a foundation for good practices is a significant ongoing challenge. Another part involves the development of a new and more sustainable way of thinking about materials that help us move away from a dependency on a few fibres, by developing a portfolio of fibres, with low resource intensity, others with rich cultural traditions and all which celebrate the range of skills, know-how and resources that are available to us (Fletcher, 2014).

According to all the concepts and key concepts already mentioned, although the differences and the combination between them, can provide a technological advance, not only in the scientific research field but also for the fashion business.

In this context of moving forward, based on Salcedo (2014), the Texboost project pretends to develop laminated and waterproof wool fabrics, applying some of the design strategies for sustainability, such as the design of a modifiable and multifunctional and reversible fashion garment for athleisure, combining the potential of functional and fashionable fabrics. The objective is that the combination of longer-lasting materials and design products will be the path for an ethical fashion and a sustainable future.

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