

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FASHION AND THE TEXTILE SECTOR AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: ISTANBUL FASHIONACADEMY EXAMPLE

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### Abstract

Since 2000, fashion and textile education in Turkey seems to be forefront of private institutions. Some of these institutions are established colleges and academies that are within leading textile companies. However, Istanbul Fashion Academy which was established collectively by the existing design institutions and individuals in business, remains in a different field among its peers in terms of its organization mission and training program. Istanbul Fashion Academy, implemented by the cooperation of The European Union, the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy and the Istanbul Textile and Apparel Exporters' Union, has a mission of training fashion designers who have a deep understanding of fashion, design and international markets, therefore providing creative, innovative skilled manpower to one of the fundamental industries of Turkey; Textile and Ready-Made Clothing Sector. As a member of

International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institutes (IFFTI), Istanbul Fashion Academy also has strategic partnership with University of Arts London/London College of Fashion, Polimoda, Institute Français de la Mode and Nottingham Trent University. This study focuses on the development of Istanbul Fashion Academy and its training program, discussing the innovations that it brought to the sector by looking at the status of its graduates in the industry.

**Keywords:** Education, Fashion, EU Project, Textile Industry, Turkey

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Development of economy and increasing production volume resulted in the advancement of professions, which subsequently led to the establishment of professional organizations. In particular, professional organizations were called 'guilds' in the Medieval Age, and 'ahi' in the Seljuk era.

Guild (*Turkish:lonca*) is the name of the location that is collectively utilized by the organized trade associations. This is the location where raw material was stored, distributed to the tradesmen and wholesaled from merchants, as well as where merchants meet in order to discuss issues related to their own organizations (Kala, 2003: 211). Although the etymology of the word is controversial, it is believed to have

been derived from the Italian word '*loggia*' or the Spanish word '*lonja*' (venue of barter or sale), and its existence in Ottoman is linked to the Jewish refugees coming from Spain (Gibb and Bowen, 1950: 285). Trade guilds are urban production organizations established by people carrying out a specific profession within the framework of mutual control and cooperation principles, and based on a hierarchical division of labor (Yıldırım, 1999: 147). The ottoman guild (*lonca*) system is quite similar to the Ahi system of the Seljuk Empire era and the trade organizations in Europe. The most prominent distinguishing characteristic of an Ottoman *lonca* is its heterogeneous structure. While even certain Christian groups were not allowed in the European guilds, Ottoman loncas were open to Muslims, as well as Jews and Christians. Moreover, some were dominated by non-Muslims (Lewis, 1937: 37). Weaving loncas are the largest group among the Ottoman loncas (Özkaya, 1985: 68).

As a closed economic system, loncas aimed to impose both business ethics such as professional discipline, honesty, recognition of work, austerity, and moral values to its members. They provided economic and social security to new members, protect the reputation of the profession, maintained the standards and prevented unjust competition (Önsoy, 1988: 3).

Tradesmen used to work within an organized structure during the production phase, as well as thereafter, during marketing of the products. An allocation policy was adopted, in order to prevent tradesmen from experiencing difficulties in supplying raw material. Such allocation policy aimed to prevent monopolism that would enable intervention in prices (Kuran, 1999: 120). Loncas were most effective in Istanbul, due to state support. When the lonca system in the Ottoman Empire is reviewed in its entirety, it can be observed that loncas were concentrated in large administrative centers, such as Istanbul and Cairo, rather than small towns and settlement areas (Pamuk, 2005: 127).

Professional associations continued to be organized in the Republic era, under the regulation and supervision of the law. As of the first years of the Republic, laws were issued with regard to professions and professional organizations (Çokgezen and Toksoy, 2011: 145). With the Law No.655 on Chambers of Commerce and Industry, issued in 1925, all tradesmen, shop owner artisans and small business owners were obligated to be registered into the trade registry through chambers of commerce and industry, and to organize under chambers (Toprak, 1994: 215). With the laws issued as of mid-1950s, regionally-established organizations began to be organized under central umbrella organizations (Çokgezen and Toksoy, 2011: 146). The status of professional organizations became a constitutional matter with the 1961 Constitution, where such institutions were reorganized as "professional organizations with public institution status", which were part of the administration (Candan, 2012: 15).

Professional organizations are important for the development and sustainability of a profession; so is professional training. Following cessation of its political and military superiority over Europe, the Ottoman Empire entered a period of political and economic reforms, defined as westernization. Although emphasis was placed in training in the same period, the existing conditions did not allow a sustainable improvement.

The Republic placed importance in professional training, as was the case with all other areas. Professional training institutions were established in various phases of education. However, it is particularly observed that higher education in textile was emphasized in the post-1980 period, with the establishment of fashion-textile departments within the universities' faculties of fine arts. This trend was followed by private foundation universities, especially within the last decade.

Negotiations between the Republic of Turkey and the European Union contributed greatly to professional development. Many state institutions and organizations, as well as the private sector and educational institutions utilized funds provided by the grant schemes of the European Union. This paper will try to shed light on the establishment phases of the Istanbul Fashion Academy, which is the outcome of a project combining education, professional organization and the textile sector.

## **2. ISTANBUL FASHION ACADEMY**

Istanbul Fashion Academy (Istanbul Moda Akademisi - IMA), is a private educational institution established in 2007 with the collaboration of the European Union, Ministry of Economy and Istanbul Textile and Apparel Exporters' Union (İTKİB). Its primary goal is to educate fashion designers having a comprehensive mindset on fashion, design and art, as well as awareness of international markets, and provide creative and innovative labor for the textile and apparel sector, one of the leading industries in Turkey, who are capable of shaping the future of the sector.

In 2007, when the project was initiated, the existing labor was around 500,000 people, distributed to 49,278 companies. Being located in the vicinity of Europe and also connected to Asia via the Silk Route, Anatolia is

able to produce goods with more export capability and manufacturing quality compared to the Far East and China. Improvement has become a necessity due to the impact of global competition on the apparel industry, speed becoming a priority in the new world, the emergence of new innovative technologies, the development of multi-country production policies, and the impact of competitive prices on the sector. This environment of improvement and competition necessitated the determination of the 21<sup>st</sup> century fashion consumers' needs. Within this context, efforts were made to determine such needs through one-to-one discussions with companies. Company types, product mix, facilities and resources, education level and function of employees, and skill and know-how deficiencies were noted in order to provide input to the fundamental structure of education to be provided by IMA.

The first study revealed, in general, that the strengths of the sector are the existence of a production chain networks from raw material to end product, product and service quality, the ability to follow fabric technologies, etc. while the weaknesses are inability to quickly respond to company needs and employee training requirements, the designers having difficulty in providing the design power required for exports, competitive markets, dependence on exports rather than the domestic market, insufficient know-how on fashion management and marketing methods, inadequate time allocated to R&D culture and lack of managers with such awareness, the employees failing or not being allowed to create time for lifelong learning activities, employees having to perform multiple tasks simultaneously, etc.

Whereas, the opportunities include the existence of new markets, young generation in the domestic market needing products from new brands, development of new virtual shopping platforms, new marketing means, the market customers developing more awareness by experiencing the product in a different field and thus placing importance on product quality, and accessibility of information.

On the other hand, the sector faces threats such as globally developing R&D technologies, China's competitive edge in price policy, advancing air transportation, tendency towards look-alike designs which deviate from high-spirited products of slow production processes due to dependence on technology, delays in analyses regarding company needs or employee training progress due to time constraints arising from speed or inability to correct deficiencies due to the same reasons, and the managers' lack of vision due to their focus on economic savings.

Lack of education in design and creative areas resulted in the teams' failure to correctly predict and interpret the trends set for design and world fashion, failure to relate them with materials, as well as the lack of aesthetic skills with color management, and a consequent lack of coordination in design development processes.

In addition to design, the mistake of separating design and technical skill in education results in employees of the sector -who lack pattern and sewing skills, marketing strategy awareness, unaware of the global structure of the fashion industry and unable to follow up the development of quality control assessment systems- fail to keep pace with the competition environment.

As a result of such analyses, educational needs of the existing situation were determined and the necessity of the existing of an education component within the project was emphasized. Due to the need for educating employees who have the design and production capabilities that would meet the needs of the broad domestic and international segments of the textile and apparel industry; the need for managers with teamwork skills and aware of the importance of the same, who are capable of keeping pace with the rapidly changing fashion world and are aware of the importance of continuous professional improvement; the importance of creative thinking for staff of all levels; the awareness that innovative pattern methods are among the most important needs of the sector; the need for motivation of personnel for teamwork culture, and the resulting holistic approach for product development; the need for reflection of culture awareness onto the sector by enhancing cultural assets; the need for enhancing the capability to produce for the upper segment; the need for eliminating the staff deficit in the other areas of the textile and apparel industry; the need for spot-on professionalization; and the need to create employment that would ensure that each task will be performed by its own expert staff rather than multiple tasks are performed by a single staff, it was decided that the schools for collaboration within the scope of the project are selected based on the needs of the Turkish textile industry but with the global markets in target.

Establishment of the Fashion Institute is socioeconomically significant. It would support the most significant industrial sector in Turkey by means of employment and import, and also help many young people of employment age to enter the business market. The existing YÖK provision is limited, and it is hard to find faculty with suitable experience or fashion-related skills. In summary, they are either inexperienced and not well-informed on the industry and its mechanisms, or they are of workshop origin and are more suitable for

occupational education. Fashion Institute would attract experts who are acknowledges in their respective areas, and enable them to offer their much needed lecture portfolios.

With the support of the Under secretariat of Foreign Trade (DTM), Istanbul Textile and Apparel Exporters' Association (İTKİB) submitted the Fashion and Textile Business Cluster Project to the Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union (SGCEU) in 2001. The Project was restructured one year later, using the Cluster and Small and Medium-Scale Enterprises (SMEs) approaches. Clustering refers to the regional concentration of firms operating in the same sector with suppliers of raw materials and services. Cluster strategies provide the ground for firms to share expertise with their counterparts as well as to enhance their employment, income and export capacities. According to the clustering method, SMEs in the textile and clothing sector work within an environment where they interact with each other and develop new strategies. Clustering is essential for the textile and clothing sector to enhance its competitiveness and quality, especially important because it is a major pillar of Turkish exports. In addition, certain institutions are established to enhance the capacity of the sector. These institutions provide technical assistance and consulting services to SMEs and support them in tackling issues like improvement of product quality and offer.

The goal of the project is to analyze the fashion and textile industry in order to provide acceleration and a new dimension to the Turkish textile sector, which has a potentially strong production network, through creative and theoretical education in the areas of history, culture, design technologies, fashion management, fashion design, fashion marketing, etc. The project also aims to establish a research and support center which will congregate culture and history researchers with creative groups in design and creative areas, enabling the sector to gain momentum through a human resource who received a well-planned education combining theory and practice.

With its location close to commercial and cultural centers, Istanbul is planned to become one of the new fashion centers of the world. The project aims to provide a dynamic strength to the needed areas through the sectoral strength, as well as national and international sectoral academic connections of Destek and İTKİB. It also aims to address the needs of the sector in a cultural and intellectual perspective, in addition to the textile point of view.

Being the first European Union project in Turkey and inspiring more than 20 SME-Cluster sectors, it aims to provide textile SMEs opportunities for education and production technologies, and give them competitive edge against their international peers. It aims to provide high quality and productivity for the textile and apparel industry, as well as the know-how required for the development of designers and commercial brands. Within the scope of the project, financial difficulties faced by the sector were overcome with the Project tender and the support provided by İTKİB, and research and development projects were prepared thereafter.

The Ministry of National Education (MEB) allocated the Sadrazam Sait Paşa Mansion in 2003, following official approval of the European Union Commission. The mansion, built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Sait Paşa, a Grand Vizier of Sultan Abdülhamid the 2<sup>nd</sup>, is a building of the westernization era of the Ottoman Empire. It was burnt down in 1988. The building has undergone a full restoration following its allocation by MEB, until the opening of the Academy.

A Project Coordination Office and EU Project Office were established under İTKİB in 2004. It was decided in the İTKİB Search Conference that an international tender process is initiated for the Improvement and Institutionalization of Turkey's Fashion Creation Capabilities, and consultancy firms are selected. In 2005, at the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the project, cluster analyses were performed along with the preparation of 5-year business plans for the departments to be established, and public promotion activities were started for the project. In 2006, İTKİB DESTEK EĞİTİM ARAŞTIRMA VE DANIŞMANLIK HİZMETLERİ A.Ş. was established to operate as a cluster coordination center. In 2007, preparations for the establishment of the Istanbul Fashion Academy, Istanbul Textile and Apparel Research and Development Center and Istanbul Textile and Apparel Consultancy Center were initiated following the establishment of DESTEK. Also in 2007, equipment needs were determined during the second phase of the project, under supervision of domestic and foreign experts, and the tender was finalized. The restoration of the building was completed during the procurement process for the equipment. Istanbul Fashion Academy was opened on December 5, 2007.

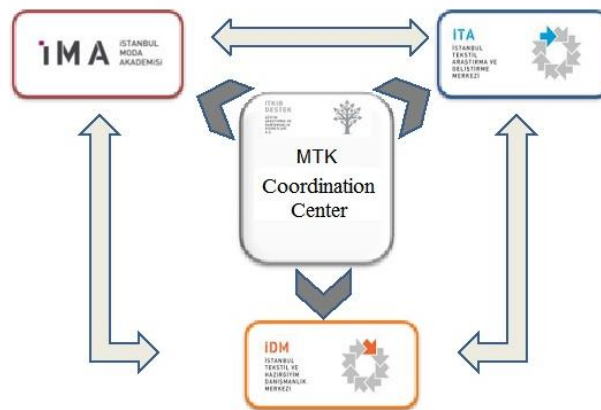


Fig. 1. Project Components

IMA Academic Programs are prepared at the undergraduate level, in collaboration with London College of Fashion (LCF). The academic program aims to educate professionals who have the skills needed by the textile industry, and who are capable of adapting their education to business practices. Academic education programs are divided into three groups: Preparation Programs, Undergraduate Programs and Programs for Succession to the industry.

IMA preparation programs include the Fine Arts Preparation Program and the Pattern and Application Preparation Program. Fashion and design areas require an artistic perspective. Thus, it should first be ensured that the students are interested in fine arts, their drawing skills are improved, and they should gain knowledge on the fundamental principles of design. IMA targets to develop such skills in students through the fine arts preparation program. Pattern preparation and application is one of the most important steps of the design process in the fashion industry. The Pattern and Application Preparation Program aims to improve technical skills of students by providing fundamental education in the pattern and application field.

The Fashion Design and Technology undergraduate program covers two distinct fields as ladies' wear and men's wear. The program is conducted based on apparel design and production techniques, principles and methodologies, fashion-related know-how, products, businesses, industry and culture. The departments aim to educate students who are capable of developing designs, have knowledge on production principles, as well as colors and fabrics. The students are given the options to receive a three-year education at the Istanbul Fashion Academy (2000 hours), or a 2-year education at the Istanbul Fashion Academy plus a 1-year education at the London College of Fashion.

IMA offers Leather Shoe and Accessory Design Graduate Diploma Program, Fashion Design and Management Graduate Diploma Program, and Pattern and Model Development Graduate Program to students who have completed undergraduate studies in Textile Design or Industrial Design.

In addition to the undergraduate and graduate programs, IMA also offers professional development programs such as Fashion Design Diploma Program; Fashion Management; Fashion Retail Merchandising; Visual Retailing and Display Design; Branding in Global Markets; Fashion Communication and PR; Style Consulting; Fashion Photography; Fashion Editing; Styling; Fashion Blog Writing and Social Media; Photoshop and Illustrator in Fashion Design; Fashion Illustration; Digital Printing Techniques; Collection Planning and Creation; Strategic Fashion Brand Management; Bag Design; Fashion Retail Store Management; Textile and Apparel Customer Representative trainings.

IMA's relations with the industry is planned to include company-specific trainings, consulting services, information sharing projects, employment and internship opportunities, rental of workshops, studios and other spaces, and sponsorships.

State-of-the-art workshops, a photograph studio, CAD-CAM production areas, an exhibition area, and most important of all, the largest fashion library in Turkey were established at the IMASadrazamSaitPaşa Mansion, capable of providing training in many fields related to fashion. With a grant of 500,000 Euros, the library has a broad collection of national and international books, magazines and publications, as well as access to over 100,000 electronic resources.

IMA entered into a strategic partnership agreement with London College of Fashion, one of the most prestigious fashion education institutes in the world, as well as collaboration agreements with Polimoda of Italy, Institut Français de la Mode of France, and Nottingham Trent University of the UK. IMA attended the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institute (IFFTI) conferences as a candidate in 2008, and currently has a permanent member status.

Within the past 8 years, IMA organized exhibitions in collaboration with culture departments of foreign countries, and had the opportunity to carry its exhibitions abroad. In addition, it has developed projects that provided its students the opportunity to visit European textile producers and cultural centers.

Besides apparel, special training programs were designed for the employees of the textile design sector in areas such as shoes, socks, leather, denim and swimming suits, with lectures given at production sites, and projects developed in collaboration with textile producers from various areas were realized with participation of IMA students. Workshops were organized in textile fairs, in cooperation with international education and design experts, aiming to increase awareness in every segment of the sector.

Through programs supporting Social Responsibility projects, design trainings were provided to students with disabilities, foreign students were provided opportunity to see İstanbul and attend workshops at the school, and scholarships were provided by the sector to highly-skilled students in financial difficulties. Within the 1-year period following opening, participation to the programs was 75% from the textile sector for short training programs, 15% from fashion sector candidates for lifelong fashion training programs, and 10% from those who want to receive long-term education after high school.

Lack of intermediate staff, which is the most serious deficiency of the Turkish textile industry, proved the necessity to reconsider vocational high schools and vocational higher education institutions. Within such context, the Ministry of National Education, İTKİB and IMA decided that Turkey should participate in Professional Skill Contests organized in Europe and throughout the world between Vocational High Schools and Vocational Higher Education Institutions. The skills and pace of the students from foreign countries in contests in Canada and Portugal, organized after the meeting conducted in 2008 in the Netherlands, revealed the necessity to re-address vocational education in Turkey. As a consequence, the first decision was to re-train the faculty first in the design area, and then in accordance with the needs of the industry. In addition, it was also revealed that not all designer candidates educated in the textile sector should be designers, but some should rather specialize in specific areas such as fashion photography, fashion display designer, fashion journalism, fashion styling, etc.

As a result of the good-will agreements entered into with prestigious European Fashion Universities and Academies throughout the years, the students were provided the opportunity to gain access to the British educational system, as well as the Italian perspective through Polimoda University, and the French instructors through Institute Francais De La Moda.

All employees of the sector and the students were provided the opportunity to attend free conferences at the exhibition center located on the topmost floor of IMA's unique historic building, in a series of conferences and exhibitions beginning with the conference delivered by Juergen Teller, a world renowned fashion photographer. Within the scope of the "İstanbul, the Cultural Capital" events in 2010, the "1994-2010 Hussein Chalayan" retrospective exhibition was organized for Hüseyin Çavaşlan, a globally acclaimed Cypriot Turkish design artist, in collaboration with Cultural Agency, IMA and İTKİB, and a book was published with the same title.

HUB/The Turkish fashion industry in all its aspects, provides an area of study which draws together researchers from many fields in recognition of its size, scope and complexity. Clothing manufacture and retailing are major contributors to national economies throughout the world and understanding and affecting change through research has become a concern for participating businesses and governments. This research hub will develop and consolidate the activities of researchers addressing the fashion consumption and business improvement of fashion design and its retailing.

Themes covered in the hub are supply chain management, understanding consumers, advertising, brand management, luxury, buying and trend prediction, retailing and store design, design management and other key aspects of the fashion process. This hub will support existing and new fashion management and marketing researchers in ways that are appropriate to their needs and provide a forum for debate and exchange of ideas. In this way, it will develop a profile for fashion marketing and management research for the Academy and enrich teaching and learning in these subjects at all levels. There are currently no other research groups in Turkish Art and Design sector that specifically address this topic. With the unique

advantage of its location in Nişantaşı, the emerging Fashion Marketing and Management hub has the potential to develop into a high profile international research group.

One of the most important activities of IMA is the lecturers who are also designers and fashion business managers already working in the textile industry. Professionals share their business experiences in the industry, with students. IMA which also has adopted systems and structures that are globally acknowledged is a member of the International Foundation of Fashion Technology Institute (IFFTI).

### 3. CONCLUSION

The westernization movement in the late periods of the Ottoman Empire affected many areas, including textile and apparel. Industrialization efforts led to the establishment of a textile sectors comprising of workshops and factories. Industrialization also created a demand for labor, which led to the establishment of the first vocational schools. However, the global military and political conditions did not allow the Ottoman Empire to successfully complete its industrialization efforts.

The 600-year-old Ottoman Empire fell at the end of World War I, and the Republic was established following a War of Independence which took place in Anatolia. Adopting a main philosophy of modernization, the young Republic implemented fundamental changes in certain areas, while continuing the westernization principle of the Ottoman in others. However, the principal aspect of the changes performed by the Republic is their revolutionary nature, with their effects observable in the public realm. Textile industry was established in various regions of Anatolia in the republic era, with the industrialization movement gaining pace. Emphasis was placed on mass vocational education in order to meet human resource needs.

Although textile education became a 4-year education in Turkey after the 1980s, it really gained momentum in the 2000s following the establishment of private foundation universities. This also corresponds to the period where Turkey began its negotiations with the European Union, and various matters began to be discussed. As of 2004, the EU began to offer grants in various areas. İstanbul Fashion Academy was established as a result of such process, in collaboration with certain sectoral institutions, in order to provide qualified human resource to the industry.

Located at the center of Nişantaşı, neighboring many other fashion brands, İstanbul Fashion Academy also gained recognition with its symbolic historical building, highlighting the quality and value of its educational services with both its interior and exterior design. The IMA library is a collection of valuable physical and online resources for anyone interested in fashion. The institution has exceeded its targets in time, by improving the contribution it has received from the experts of its founding partner, London School of Fashion, as well as with its pace-setting training programs, broad range of trainings (evening, weekend and daily workshops), and trainings scheduled for different times in accordance with the needs of the sector. In addition to the sectoral projects and international projects offered to its students, those who has completed their last educational year at the London School of Fashion were provided employment in the industry.

Being supported by the Textile and Apparel Exporters' Union (İTKİB), an umbrella institution of the industry, and offering a curriculum aiming to ensure development and innovation of SMEs within the scope of the European Union Project, IMA sets an example in the Turkish vocational education system. In contrast with the design-oriented approach adopted by numerous Turkish universities for fashion education, IMA focuses on, and succeeds in, educating designer candidates who are aware of the importance of the design-sales-marketing trilogy; comprehend the necessity of professional skills in design, and progress from local to universal by incorporating cultural and conventional values.

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