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## **Knowledge sharing and development of creative fashion designers' careers: the role of intermediary organisations**

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**Abstract:** The study of fashion designers in Montreal allows us to examine the support they can get for their career as a model for creative careers, as well as the management support that can be given to creative careers and industries to reduce risk in their activity. As part of a research on the fashion cluster in Montreal, we investigated the role of intermediary organisations in the support and risk reduction for professional trajectories of designers. To achieve a good understanding of skills deployed by the creators/designers in their fashion design trajectory, our research examines the most important management and financial supports for the determinant moments in these creative careers. The paper highlights the role of connexions and interactions, as well as the role of the local support organisations and professional associations.

**Keywords:** fashion designers, creative careers, intermediary organisations; knowledge sharing; creative city.

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## 1 Introduction

Our paper centres on the role of knowledge sharing in fashion designers' careers in the creative city and how this support can be brought to these creative careers (Becker, 1988; Menger, 2002; Moulin, 1992), taking into account their uncertain horizons (Menger, 2009, 2010) in a context of restructuring of an industry (garment-fashion) that is strongly affected by the crisis. It shows how the fashion sector 'supply chain' is an example of smart specialisation, as this sector's development is largely based on knowledge sharing between various members of the supply chain and of the sector in general, as well as specialisation of designers in specific niches of production. In Montreal, the sectors of Fur, children's clothing and a few others have been identified as specific niches, but others exist as well in women's clothing. The objective is to understand the knowledge base of these creative careers, as we feel this can help secure the future of careers, as is proposed by Menger (2002). The new creative economy is a crucial and dynamic issue for a territory, a city, or a region (Florida, 2002; Pecqueur, 2006, Scott, 2000) and therefore, the understanding of knowledge sharing and career trajectories in these creative clusters is important to understand the dynamics and support the development of these creative clusters. The transformation of the garment-fashion industry does indeed pose the question of the role of knowledge sharing and of creative professionals in the restructuring of the sector and at the same time, the issue of how cities such as Montreal (second tier cities in this sector) can distinguish themselves in the fashion field, on the local, national and international scales. To understand how the garment-fashion industry is restructuring and to identify the role that knowledge sharing within designers' circles can play in this revitalisation, we analyse the role of intermediary actors and formal and informal interactions, as these form the core of knowledge sharing and social capital building.

### *1.1 From a crisis in the garment industry to the emergence of a creative fashion sector*

At the macro level with the effects of globalisation, there are major changes occurring in the garment-fashion industry. "We are moving from a traditional industry, a blue-collar service industry, to a white-collar" (Milstein and Cie Inc., 2011). "The garment and fashion industry in Quebec is a relevant example in this regard, the study commissioned by the Council of Human Resources in the garment industry shows that the post-industrial era is precisely marked by 'the continual growth of white-collar employment'" (Milstein and Cie Inc., 2011) and this largely relates to fashion designers, although marketing and other functions are also increasing.

The restructuring of the industry is accompanied by the emergence of a world of fashion in Montreal which reflects wider societal changes, as new niches are being developed in the fields of ethical clothing, fur and leather recycling, children's designer

clothing and new textiles for sports clothing. The accent is placed on originality and creativity expressed in the design. Creativity and innovation represent new added value which make it possible to stand out in an increasingly competitive market, especially that of an industrialised nation, where labour costs are high in comparison with Mexico or Asia and where low cost production can no longer represent a competitive edge for Montreal.

Governments together with the City of Montreal support actions to establish the image of a fashion city and encourage the use of design in the industry by providing financial assistance (programmes and actions of the industry department). It gives players the opportunity to face challenges in a climate of considerable upheaval in the industry. As Montreal, with many other cities, aspires to be qualified a creative city, following a movement that Boltanski and Thévenot expressed as “the transition from a social state to another where nothing seems definitive” (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999), many industrial and political actors intervene to try to accelerate the movement towards this creative city and this often has to do with the workers and professionals in the field. Montreal thus puts forward this objective of becoming a creative city and in this context, the creative fashion cluster, with the value of its local brands and niche fashion designers, is amongst the flagships of the movement.

### *1.2 Montreal's support to the fashion cluster*

Before we go on to the theoretical framework, we need to mention that in 2006, Montreal was named UNESCO City of Design, which is a form of recognition as a creative city. For this, the city had to meet a certain number of criteria including the following, which explain the continued interest of the city in the fashion sector:

- the active promotion of local creativity
- sharing common interests, such as cultural diversity
- sharing experiences and creating new opportunities for itself or for other cities on a global platform, for example, by encouraging creative tourism.

The creative industries are defined as “industries which have their origins in the creativity, expertise and individual talent and have the potential to create jobs” (Florida, 2002). Creative industries include various sectors: film and video, design, architecture, music, fashion, as well as the more traditional arts and crafts in some cases. In the context of the creative economy, Montreal puts forward its local creative professionals, including fashion designers.

That is why its creative fashion cluster, a recognised hotbed of creativity, is part of this dynamics including a particular niche, focusing on ethical awareness and social responsibility. The fashion programme of the City of Montreal is essential to support the creators and designers but many players in the fashion community do not seem to be fully aware of these actions, while some insist on their importance in their career.

One of the main actions in the field has to do with the *Montréal style libre*<sup>1</sup> action plan from the Fashion Bureau, which includes the following:

- 1 *strategic events*: supporting promotion and events that bring together existing and emerging fashion designers, a strategy in collaboration with the community and various projects with community leadership

- 2 *branding platform*: developing a visual identity for use by manufacturers, designers and retailers to develop the Montreal branding and using this identity to develop exports
- 3 *positioning*: developing a web strategy, creating a platform for collaboration through Web 2.0, fostering partnerships, creativity and visibility of new players from the Montreal fashion scene and establishing collaboration between the community, the fashion schools and fashion management departments in universities
- 4 *Montreal Fashion Bureau*: developing a project coordination office in the fashion sector, ensuring the reception and the choice of projects according to predetermined criteria, developing and promoting the Montreal brands and reaping the benefits of the branding as a city of fashion.

## **2 Theoretical framework from a crisis in the garment industry to the emergence of a creative fashion sector**

We now turn to the concept of creative city and economy as it has had an important impact on the recent evolution of the garment-fashion sector.

### *2.1 The creative city and economy*

The concept of the creative city was first used in the early 1960s by urban critic and sociologist Jane Jacobs. She was the first person to talk about ‘creative cities’ in her book *Cities and the Wealth of Nations* (1985), i.e., cities which are particularly innovative, diversified and driven towards innovation. Her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) examined urban areas of the North American city and the conditions influencing urban diversity, which in turn influenced creativity. Jacobs maintains that diversity and exchanges of ideas play an important role in the creation of a powerful and dynamic urban vitality. The presence of different ethnic and economic realities in a local context is seen as an advantage for the community since diversity is a source of creativity as well as social and other forms of innovation.

To develop a ‘climate’ conducive to attracting new human capital, essential to its community, the city must stimulate this interaction between individuals, support creativity and be enriched by cultural diversity. According to Jacobs (1961), the ‘bulldozer approaches’ to planning lead to major development projects, based on the top-down approach and have catastrophic consequences for cities. Jacobs thus considers that creativity and exchanges of ideas play an important role in the creative development of cities.

The creative economy concept emerged in 2001, in John Howkins’s book, *The Creative Economy*, which analyses the relationship between creativity and economics. It has recently taken a special meaning, with the controversial concept of the creative city, often associated with the works of Richard Florida but also taken up by other researchers (see various articles in Tremblay and Tremblay, 2006.). Many reports have been produced on the creative city and economy by international organisations (UNESCO, UN, OECD, etc.) and a large number of industrialised countries (Britain, Italy, New Zealand, Australia, etc.). Regions or cities remain alert to the emergence of the creative economy for economic development across territories (Tremblay, 2012; Tavano Blessi

et al., 2012). In this context, we are moving from the concept of the world city (historical or cultural capital, for example London or Paris) to the creative city, as innovation and creativity are becoming new paradigms for the city of the future and many cities seek to highlight their creative sectors or dimensions.

For example, the City of London has a reputation that continues to grow, highlighting its creativity and originality. Other cities try to place themselves in the growing phenomenon of global ranking of cities; these rankings are based on very diverse set of criteria and include elements such as creativity, innovation, security, access to university education, cost of living, quality of life and many more. These rankings are not based only on past reputation, the history of cities, or cultural prestige. They actually give the opportunity to new cities to position themselves on the world stage. Although this is not easily done, many cities try to put forward their new creative sectors in order to gain a better ranking as more traditional touristic attractions and historical buildings are a given, impossible to develop for many cities, but also as younger travellers look for new dimensions in their travels.

The concepts of creative city and economy have been adopted in many countries and it appears that initially, the UK emerged as the leader in the creative economy. The creative cities network of UNESCO brings together Berlin, Montreal, Nagoya, Shanghai, amongst others. These cities develop a metropolitan identity around creativity and design.

In his book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida (2002) says that ideas, knowledge and information exchange within the creative workers' group are essential for the production of innovations. He also maintains that creativity is as essential to economic prosperity as natural resources and financial capital and his writings (2004, 2005), while contested by some (see Markusen, 2006a, 2006b; Markusen and Schrock, 2006, Tremblay and Tremblay, 2010), contributed largely to the attention now being paid to creativity and the creative city, as well as the role of the arts and creative-sectors in territorial development.

Florida's theory on 'creative cities' is centred on the idea that attracting and retaining talents (professionals, people from cultural and artistic communities as well as the education and training sectors) are key processes for economic development and reconversion. However, Markusen's work on neighbourhoods in some US cities shows that creativity can also appear in difficult situations and among people who do not have high levels of education. People at all levels of education can be creative (Markusen 2006b, cited in Klein and Tremblay, 2010b).

While Florida can be given credit for putting cultural and creative activities in the centre of debates on innovation and the development of cities, his approach has also been criticised by some (Klein and Tremblay, 2010a) as being elitist and possibly conducive to social segregation.

While Florida's studies have mainly focused on the link existing between creativity and urban economic prosperity, other authors such as Throsby (2000) have argued that the purpose of a creative city goes beyond the economic dimension and includes the social dimension. Indeed, culture depends on a degree of attention to local and global concerns while not being destructive of local solidarity.

If Florida's theories have put forward the creative city, other authors such as Sacco and Ferilli (2006) put forward a model of cultural clustering which is implemented through a form of horizontal integration of different systems. The authors refer to the 'proactive cultural district', a model which is achieved through strategic complementarity between cultural systems and production systems, a synergy defined through a territorial

specialisation and a new spatial organisation. Based on this concept, the production and supply of culture are not perceived as profit centres, but are perfectly integrated into the new post-industrial 'value chain' (Sacco and Pedrini, 2003); this represents a major chain by virtue of its symbolic content. The 'value' is part of the post-industrial economy; it becomes a characteristic of individual well-being and constitutes a necessary factor for consolidating a socially recognised and sustainable identity model.

In the proactive form of the 'cultural district', the high density of cultural or creative companies – independent from and complementing each other – becomes a competitive factor for a territory (Pilati and Tremblay, 2007), which explains why many cities are interested in attracting creative activities such as fashion design.

Based on these theses, our study of the fashion cluster can help to better understand the concept of the creative city and its usefulness.

## 2.2 *Career theory*

Given our research objectives, we have already presented the theory on the creative city and careers and we now give a few complementary elements on career theory and on networks and proximity issues, as these are central to our thinking on the creative clusters and the role of intermediary organisations.

The theory of internal labour markets was traditionally the core of career theory, which has focused on the organisational or vertical career. Horizontal and other forms of mobility (Rosenbaum, 1979) were not studied as much since they were viewed as lack of advancement and thus of career.

Most authors in career theory, such as Super (1957), or Hall and Goodale (1986), divide careers into four phases: exploration (learning period), mastery (development), maintenance (routine) and disengagement (retreat). While the precise number of successive stages is contested by some, it does constitute an important reference. Weick (1976) also considers there is no empirical basis to confirm the succession of these phases and the new boundaryless career theories tend to indicate that lines are more blurred and there is no regular succession of phases.

This model has thus been questioned (Sullivan, 1999; Sullivan and Baruch, 2009) and some authors have put forward a vision of careers referring to the 'boundaryless careers' (Arthur et al., 1995; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998, 1996), or the 'nomadic' careers (Cadin et al., 1999; Tremblay, 2003). More recently, other authors have highlighted the contingent character of many careers and have indicated that boundaryless careers may have presented a too optimistic view of career trajectories – although the theory per se does highlight many negative dimensions, including precariousness and instability of many trajectories (Jones, 1996), with negative impacts on income at times, something which can be found in the fashion design sector.

In the boundaryless careers approach there are three elements which interact and contribute to career mobility:

- a *knowing how* (knowledge, abilities and acquired routines)
- b *knowing whom* (privileged relationships, contacts and social networks)
- c *knowing why* (interests, values and identity construction).

This new vision of careers is focused on learning, knowledge sharing, reputation building and identity construction (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994) and this appears pertinent for

sectors such as fashion and other creative sectors, where knowledge, ways of seeing things, ways of thinking, tricks of the trade or job opportunities are transmitted through the network and social relations (DeFillippi and Arthur, 1994).

The concept of the boundaryless or protean careers (Hall, 1996) thus leads to an understanding of careers as being built largely on experience and networks (knowing whom), which contributes to develop a 'career capital', which in turn can lead to access to some specific institutional or professional networks [Cadin et al., (2000), p.79]. For many people however, these boundaryless careers can actually be rather precarious careers, as it is not always easy to develop social capital, networks and career capital. Career capital results from an accumulation of career competencies and this can contribute to building a reputation in a creative career, but at the same time possibly contribute to the neutralisation or at least reduction of risk, an important dimension in a fashion and other creative careers. This new vision of careers thus highlights the importance of networks and relational proximity for knowledge sharing and, in turn, to support careers and territorial development.

### *2.3 Risk, networks and relational proximity in designer's creative career*

Creative production is usually based on project-based organisations and labour flexibility (Lorenzen and Frederiksen, 2005). As project-and creative-based at the same time, creative organisations face many risks. These organisations therefore tend to organise in clusters and networks as a way of dealing with this diversity of risks (Kaiser and Liecke, 2007). Risk is omnipresent in fashion design but it is possible to deal with risk through relations, interactions proximity and local intermediary organisations' support, these organisations being the core of our research.

Fashion designer careers are clearly the object of many important risks. Indeed, designers are continuously confronted with risky or very variable and changing situations. Creators in a creative industry such as fashion are constantly embedded in an uncertain context (Banks et al., 2000). Aesthetic judgment on fashion is regularly the object of taste volatility, change, evolution and contestation (Caves, 2000; De Vany, 2004; De Vany and Walls, 1997). Fashion design can be of high quality but may not always have commercial value and the contrary is also true (Hirsch, 2000, 1972). Thus, not only is the creative process uncertain (Menger, 2002, 2001), but the market demand is also very uncertain and it is often difficult for fashion designers to reconcile both of their objectives, that of a creative career and that of a business. However, as some research seems to indicate, networks and intermediary organisations support can constitute a risk filter or a factor contributing to risk reduction (Lupton, 1999; Klein et al., 2009), as we will see in our results.

Indeed, knowledge sharing activities support the creative careers of designers, by activating network development (*knowing whom*), passion for the fashion sector (*knowing why*) but also more traditional elements related to Knowledge (*knowing how*), thus highlighting the importance of social capital as a career capital (Arthur et al., 1995; Cadin et al., 2000; DeFillippi and Arthur, 1998, 1996).

Rantisi and Leslie (2010) analyse the workplaces and space design of various new sectors, including the fashion sector. They show that the public spaces and the neighbourhood in which designers locate are important to them as this can have an impact on the chance encounters and interactions between creative workers. These chance encounters can become a source of cooperation, interdependencies and risk

reduction. In our view, intermediary support organisations should try to valorise such elements in the neighbourhoods in order to support fashion designers' careers and we sought out to see if this was the case.

In industrial and creative cluster studies (Holbrook and Wolfe, 2002), researchers' have been highlighting the role of networks and relational proximity, after that of physical or geographical proximity. Actually, both forms of proximity appear to be intertwined and possibly more so in creative sectors. Relational proximity has to do with personal and organisational relations and networks between individuals and is thus more than beyond physical proximity. Researchers agree that physical proximity does not appear to automatically have an influence on a sector (or designers') capacity to be creative. Indeed, personal interactions and access to information networks are key factors when a firm or an individual decides to create (Britton et al., 2009). In other words, physically cohabiting with other creators may be of less importance than what was originally thought, but it can impact on the capacity to create if it also gives way to relational proximity.

To conclude, in creative industries, the creative process as well as the consumption part (sale of designs) of the process are full of risk and uncertainty (Acheson and Maule, 1994; Jones and Lichtenstein, 2008; Menger, 1999). In our research, we sought to see how designers' careers fit into the above typologies and more importantly how the intermediary organisations and networks can eventually contribute to reduce risk in fashion design and support the development of the creative cluster of fashion.

We could add a theoretical interest here as well, which has to do with the understanding of careers themselves. As careers have changed and become more boundaryless (Jones, 1996) in many sectors today, but particularly in the creative careers, we look at these careers as possible precursors of other changes in the labour market, to some extent as Menger (2002, 2001) has proposed, seeing artistic careers as announcing wider changes in the labour market and careers in other sectors, amongst other elements a development of contingent and more precarious jobs.

### **3 Methodology**

Our research is based on two series of interviews, a first series done in the years from 2008 to 2010 and a second from 2010 to now, with designers (30) but also with intermediary organisations and government departments (12) that are active in the fashion sector. The interviewees were chosen first of all by contacting associations and obtaining lists of companies and designers in various subsectors (fur, children's clothing, women and men's clothing) as well as by looking at the websites and Facebook pages of many companies and designers in the fashion sector. We established a list of potential interviewees and then chose a certain number, trying to get some diversity and representativeness, although this cannot be totally ensured in a qualitative process such as ours. We then contacted them by phone and asked for interviews. Most organisations as well as designers accepted and we had very few refusals. We did open-ended interviews with these actors, transcribed all interviews and conducted a thematic analysis to identify mainly three elements:

- 1 how are careers constructed in this creative sector
- 2 what is the role of intermediary organisations and government departments

- 3 what is the impact of knowledge sharing, intermediary organisations and government departments on creative careers in fashion.

We analysed each interview and collected the material on these three themes (vertical analysis) and then compared the elements collected on each of the themes (horizontal analysis) to see to what extent there was convergence or divergence in the designers' views.

## **4 Results**

In this section, we will present our results on knowledge sharing and access to knowledge and information in the fashion design sector, as well as the support brought by intermediary organisations to the fashion designers' careers, as these organisations are often one of the main sources of knowledge and networking in the sector. We thus asked fashion designers if they were aware of these programme as and organisations and how they used them, for what specific purposes and what this brought to them.

### *4.1 Fashion designers' views on the programmes and intermediary organisations' support*

Given page limits for the paper, we cannot present here all our interviews and results, but we summarise some main elements on fashion designers' views on the roles of some intermediary organisations active in the fashion sector as concerns the support that can be offered in terms of knowledge access and sharing particularly. A report on the creative sectors presents creative careers as individual careers intertwined with more global cultural infrastructure (Conférence Canadienne des arts, 2008). It presents different stages of the career path and highlights the role of formal and informal relationships, as well as intermediary organisations through grants, mentoring, regional, national and international links, branding and marketing, but also international visits and events supporting the establishment of a reputation. These are all elements that we looked into in our interviews.

To start with, we need to mention that designers often see themselves as apart from the garment industry. Thus, while many programmes and organisations address the whole garment-fashion sector, many designers consider that the two are very distinct.

The fashion design sector is becoming the more visible activity in the sector as Montreal wants to put forward an image of creative city. In Montreal, activities were traditionally mainly in the manufacturing of clothing, but there are now more and more retailers who design and manufacture their clothing lines and thus hire designers. We thus met some designers working for manufacturing firms, but mainly independent designers. As concerns the views of the designers on the role of intermediary organisations, partnerships and support available to assist them in their efforts, we received some positive comments about various government programmes and agencies, but we focus here on two organisations that stand out as particularly innovative and are important in contributing to facilitate partnerships and knowledge sharing in the fashion/garment cluster.

#### 4.2 SAJE: a support for young entrepreneurs<sup>2</sup>

Created in 1985, the SAJE (service for young entrepreneurs) is an important resource for entrepreneurs. Its mission is to contribute to the success of new entrepreneurs in Quebec by offering consulting, coaching and training. For many designers, the SAJE is a very important organisation, invaluable for their business development.

“For me, the SAJE is the partner that is most important. At first it was the Community Economic Development Corporation of Plateau Mont-Royal. (...) But then, you see. (...) They are somewhat less active, in the sense that they are present in the Creative Lab, but they no longer give grants to designers, it is a little against their way of doing things now. Organizations such as SAJE, I expect nothing financially, but I can count on a valuable support for my development, so I’m interested.” (D1)<sup>3</sup>

“At first, it is sure it helped a lot. Accounting courses, (...) I learned a lot, this is very important and now, there are still activities, workshops they offer, with Creative Lab directly or SAJE full of important things ...” (D7)

“This is an organization that is truly present for businesses but in the garment sector, it is a sector that has been over-exploited in recent years, so subsidies are perhaps less important ... There is plenty of help, for example, new technologies, there are many coaching possibilities.” (D5)

If the SAJE is a very useful organisation for many designers in starting a business, for others, the services are not very accessible, very little known to designers. Thus, for some designers, it seems that the larger companies benefit the most from this support whether it is from the SAJE, the Lab Créatif (Creative Lab) or even more, from Vêtement Québec (governmental association that supports designers).

“I do not know many designers who deal with organizations like these. This is the big companies on Chabanel, or large producers. The link is still weak with us.” (D5)

#### 4.3 The Creative Lab

Since its creation in 2004 and throughout its restructuring in 2011, the Creative Lab has greatly helped the Montreal and Quebec designers. With over 150 designers, with a maximum of two to five employees each, the Creative Lab promotes professional exchanges and knowledge sharing. Its action is respond to the needs of members in all aspects of operating a business in fashion design. (Klein et al., 2009) The Creative Lab brings designers together in order to share expertise, resources and experiences: “The LAB is an initiative resulting from the environment, developed and managed by designers who have come together to take part in the economic development of their communities, to create a partnership that meets their expectations.” (LABoratoire creative website, accessed on 25 September 2012)

For many designers, the Creative Lab is an important ally in functions such as production, management, distribution, promotion and funding. It is considered an important source of information for a *clear and immediate need* on the availability of government grants, networking and collaboration between designers. To be associated with the Lab Créatif also gives online visibility to a designer’s creations and makes it possible for them to sell collectively the results of their work through the web.

“The Creative Lab helps us a lot. It has a lot of resources ... it has something from governments, grants and all that.” (D10)

“Networking, advertising for events. They organize sales, often collective, parades, advertising, promotions. Then, also for the sharing of sewing machines and all the machinery.” (D8)

“The Creative Lab gives us access to resources, allows us to make collective sales, we find and share information through cocktails, happy hours (5 à 7) . If we have a need, it is an association that meets a specific need and it responds every time when you need it, very quickly, so for me it is very, very important. Honestly, I am very pleasantly surprised and it brings me more than I could ever have imagined. I am with the Lab since the beginning...” (D9)

“Many focus on the innovative nature of this organization and the importance of interactions and partnerships it created, seeing it as an important source of information in the field of fashion management. If Marie St-Pierre was alone as a fashion designer, she could not do it. If MUSE was alone, he could not do it either. So this is a team strength, when we talk about Marie St-Pierre, MUSE, Andy The-Anh, Jean-Claude Poitras and everything. The Lab Créatif, it is strong because they are a hundred members. If there was one alone, it would not happen.” (D2)

“It is really the exchange of information, it is like a network, they provide information. You need something, you ask if someone knows it or I have a problem with this pattern, in the sewing technique, it is a mixture of information exchange, I find that it is great... especially about trends, designs and stuff. It is like looking for the person and for all that, I think it's the only place there is something for designers.” (D10)

As we can see, the designers see the Creative Lab as a meeting place for designers and other actors in the community, a source of information and sharing of resources, but the benefits are perceived more positively by younger designers. Sharing with peers gives them some motivation and brings them out of their creative isolation. The lab is also seen as an ‘incubator’ for professional and technological development, support to develop the status of a designer, as well as a showcase for their creations, through a website. Instead of promoting the excellence of a few designers, this is also the place to develop relationships with several players that revolve around the fashion industry at ‘happy hours’ organised by the Creative Lab.

“Many of my students and young designers are members. (...) The Lab Créatif is a common room, shared devices and tools ... there are many benefits to it, because the first year alone, we do not necessarily need to get a loan for 100,000 dollars to buy all the machines, I think when you graduate from school, you must first know if you like doing the job, you must first be in an incubator, a place to help us, help with the product, refine it, get feedback from consumers, the media, and this lab is very important to filter just the designers who realize they should continue or not. I think it is an aid that allows young people to have a professional status with a place to do business from the beginning.” D3

“The LabCréatif is very important ; especially it helps people who start with nothing.” (D2)

“It helped me to go further. If I need something, I call the Director, the Creative Lab, ah, I need this... ‘Oh, we’ll inform the others’. I also received, for example, aid in the collection, I made my first collection under my name. The director found me photographers, models, everything, everything, everything

for me, professional photos, maybe for \$ 3000, it was all free. There is a lot of help for designers.” (D10)

“LabCréatif for sure, they try to promote designers. They are there for us, to help us.” (D11)

“Creative Lab’s services also allow some designers to structure, develop or build their brand in order to settle permanently. For publicity, promotion and maybe helping to access...like the Fashion week ... or events that designers will have more difficulty to obtain on their own. It is often managed by a person who has a good network of contacts, to be sure, it helped to integrate the market. These are more potential results.” (D5)

There are some complaints against the fact that they feel they have to pay for various things, but critiques were few. For other designers, the Creative Lab plays a very small role for them and it does not contribute sufficiently to the flow of knowledge between public and private actors and creative entrepreneurs. For some, it is first necessary to ‘keep abreast’, to take steps to access granting agencies or professional services. There is also the fact that the fashion world is a creative sector based on personal artistic approaches, and it may be more difficult to reach the most individualistic persons. Thus, for some designers, the lab should be more pro-active to help young designers benefit from the expertise of others:

“ It really depends on each person, because there are a lot of designers who do not know anything, but ... who isolate themselves. You have more social designers who keep abreast and who are part of groups, networks, etc...” (D11)

#### *4.4 Vision of clusters among designers*

As for the cluster policy of the city of Montreal and the creation of a fashion-garment cluster, many are unsure of how this can be arranged. For many, one of the obstacles to the expansion of Montreal fashion is the lack of relationships between designers and manufacturers and lack of partnerships. This can be explained by fundamental differences between the artistic vision of the creators and the more financially oriented manufacturers. Some have a positive vision of the clusters, since there are many advantages such as knowledge sharing and management skills, as well as strength in numbers.

“This is important. That is clear. Sharing knowledge and management skills.” (D20)

“To answer your question, I’m all for creating a cluster in the field of garment-fashion. The mini cluster, Creative Lab which I am currently part of, brings a lot of benefits to the development of my company as I have mentioned to you (sharing, support ... like a small community.) An even larger group can only be beneficial. (...) The information flowing more easily into a cluster, it would be easier for everyone to know the new environment, innovations, projects, new technologies, etc.” (D8)

“For a designer, the proximity effect is seen as a competitive advantage, good to increase sales. Thus, an area that includes several businesses attracts more tourists, for example, because it is the competition that attracts customers. If I a tourist wants to come here, if there is just one boutique, he will not come. So it is competition that brings customers. If there are several small shops, the customer will come.” D2

In contrast, another designer has a negative perception of the proximity effect, considering that it can affect the creativity and originality of the designers. He says that observing the practices of others, might lead to a designer '*getting lost*' in a certain similarity of ideas and creativity.

For most designers, clusters are seen as something that mobilises actors, creates a partnership between industry, business people and manufacturers, a larger economic vision of the clothing sector. Thus, one can see a clear break between the perceived economic vision of the industry and the most creative or subculture creators who feel more challenged by the artistic side, or closer to crafts.

For some designers, it seems difficult to reconcile all the industry players in one all-encompassing cluster project. For some, it appears that the relative importance of the creative work and individualistic side can hinder the development of a cluster or another form of networking in this sector.

Still, most designers recognise that networks related to the community (fashion events, knowledge of other arts and craft sectors, the use of intermediary organisations, professional associations) are essential for social capital development and for the evolution of their career.

Also, our interviews highlight the willingness of public actors to structure and consolidate a creative fashion cluster using many intermediary players through the implementation of a relational network consisting of regional, national and international links and the interest of many designers in such developments.

As concerns the conditions of the relationships between the designers, the public and civil society (meetings, conferences and events, implementing programmes and actions) our results show that in order to support the fashion cluster, cooperation and coordination of actions are extremely important.

As part of the global economy, the fashion designer must consider all strategies, creating and innovating every season, for each collection. To distinguish him or herself in a competitive environment, he or she must develop social networks, develop strengths and relational capital. Based on our interviews, we see that it is not enough to have talent; one also needs entrepreneurial qualities and they must be continually adapted to the changing environment. The support of intermediary organisations can be useful here to support the business and entrepreneurial dimension of the fashion designers' career. Indeed, interaction with key players in the community is important; participating in various projects related to fashion, visibility in important events, involvement in social causes, etc. are important elements that can contribute to build a career. Although this is not the case for everyone, many fashion designers participate in these events and networks that are important for their career while remaining attentive to their reputation and preserving their professional identity and individuality. They interact with customers, intermediary organisations, institutions, the Fashion Bureau, SAGE, Creative Lab, sponsors, media and sometimes get involved in social causes as well. But through all this, they try to preserve their personal identity and image to make sure their creative dimension is not overtaken by a short term commercial dimension. They feel it is important to ensure a more long term creative career and success. They highlight the role of networks and intermediary organisations in creative careers in the fashion industry.

Beyond the importance of the creativity of the individual, our results show the role of connexions and interactions, as well as the role of the local support organisations and professional associations in this. From a theoretical point of view, this confirms the importance of social capital as a career capital and shows how significant knowledge

sharing activities and intermediary organisations can play a determinant role in building creative careers in specialised niches of the fashion industry.

## 5 Conclusions

We will conclude on the theoretical, managerial and policy implications and the novelty of our contribution to the scientific debate.

Starting with managerial and policy implications, our research and interviews show that although a number of fashion designers are not aware of the management and networking support they can get, for those who are aware of this, it is helpful to develop their creativity and their careers and to reduce risk by relying on intermediary organisations (Fashion Bureau, Creative Lab and many others are mentioned by the fashion designers). It would definitely be important for policy people to get the information out and find a way to increase knowledge sharing within the community on the existing programmes and organisations that can support fashion designers.

The exact combination of factors which can support a career may be more or less important depending on the trajectory of each individual fashion designer but some form of support and knowledge seems essential to varying degrees, especially in the early stages of the career. Policy should take this into account and try to support the designers at the beginning of their career, helping in reducing risk. The following elements come out of the interviews with designers and other actors of the fashion cluster as essential elements for the fashion career but possibly also to develop and nurture other creative careers and clusters in Montreal and they should be taken into account in policy development:

- *A strong social capital and dynamic environment* as well as strengthening knowledge exchanges between professionals and intermediary actors helps reduce risk and gives access to information.
- *Concrete support such as private or public funds, grants, fellowships, local support* for various events, etc. should also be offered. These are particularly important in early career, to enable young artists to engage professionally, meet others, find their niche of specialisation, develop their networks and social capital.
- *Resources and targeted knowledge dissemination should be ensured to all designers:* for example, the dissemination of information on programmes and organisations that can support a career something which many young designers are unfortunately not aware of.
- A fluid communication within the fashion cluster, multiplication of meetings between people in the community can sometimes get the designers out of their isolation. For reasons of lack of interest, lack of time or because of the individualistic tendency of designers/artists, many hesitate to contact others in the same profession (distrust, individualism, etc.) although this can often be useful to both persons/designers. The film sector has shown the difficulty of organising a cluster composed of many small firms and independent workers and this is the case also in Fashion, as we observed here.

In this context, all actors in the environment could theoretically be interested in networking and acting together despite the challenges of a fragmented industry that has to deal with globalisation and the relocation of much of its production in the low wage countries. However important for the future of the fashion sector, it is clear that knowledge sharing, cooperation and collaboration do not develop spontaneously (Klein and Tremblay, 2009; Pilati and Tremblay, 2008). There is an important role for intermediary organisations to play in the sector in order to develop a dynamic cluster, but also to reduce risk and isolation and support the careers of young designers.

From a theoretical point of view, our research has shown that theories on risk analysis and on careers can be nuanced by the analysis of this fashion sector. Indeed, as careers have changed and become more contingent and boundaryless (Jones, 1996) in many sectors today, but particularly in the creative careers, the creative fashion careers can be considered as precursors of other changes in the labour market (Menger, 2002) and as has been proposed, seeing artistic careers as announcing wider changes in careers and the more general labour market scene Menger (2002, 2001). Intermediary organisations could thus be useful in other creative sectors and in other sectors as well to support careers and economic development (Battaglia and Tremblay, 2011; Darchen and Tremblay, 2010; Dossou-Yovo and Tremblay, 2012). Our research has contributed to the knowledge in both these fields, that is on creative careers and intermediary organisations, as well as the links between the two fields.

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## Notes

- 1 Developed in 2009 with the creation of the Montreal Fashion Bureau or Bureau de la Mode de Montréal (BMM).
- 2 Elements in points 4.2.1, 4.2.1. and 4.2.3. were also presented in a conference on partnerships, in New York City, in summer 2013. Some elements might be published in a book, but after revisions.
- 3 Designer no 1.