


*Elisabetta Merlo*  and *Valeria Pinchera*

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## Configuring Cultural Emerging Industries: A Comparison of the French and Italian Fashion Industries

This paper builds on a body of multi-disciplinary literature to analyze and compare the emergence of the prêt-à-porter industry in France and the ready-to-wear industry in Italy from their founding to their growth stages in the mid-twentieth century. The comparison demonstrates the significant impact that the French *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, des Confectionneurs et des Tailleurs pour Dame*, and the National Chamber of Italian Fashion had on the trajectories of the fashion industry for each country. The article focuses on foundational entrepreneurs within the industry such as Giovanni Battista Giorgini, Jean Patou, Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, and others. It analyzes how these chambers supported the emergence of differentiated firms within the fashion industry, and how the industry responded to the business conditions in the international economy of the post-World War II period through the global recession of the 1970s.

**Keywords:** fashion industry, industry emergence, France, Italy

**E**merging industries are new ones in the early stages of development. They are characterized by a high level of uncertainty, great challenges, an undefined industry structure and network, and undetermined technological and production standards. Since William Abernathy and James Utterback's seminal study, emerging industries have developed as a well-established management and organizational

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studies research topic over the last decades.<sup>1</sup> This literature helped identify three key phases in industry emergence; namely, the initial, co-evolutionary, and growth stages. Studies also shed light on what determines each phase and on the transition from one phase to another; namely, technological or design innovations and the number of entrants and incumbent firms as well as their institutional, cultural, and social environments.<sup>2</sup>

Management and organization scholars have increasingly recognized the relevance of historical sources when examining industries' emergence, which business historians have generally approached from historical and narrative perspectives, avoiding the use of a theoretical framework.<sup>3</sup> These different standpoints made emerging industries a research topic of relevance to the "historic turn" debate that flourished over the last twenty years.<sup>4</sup>

Within this burgeoning discussion, Mairi Maclean, Charles Harvey, and Stewart Clegg pointed out that business historians could contribute significantly to the research stream of emerging industries by increasing their engagement with theory and, specifically, by highlighting the organizational and institutional long-term trajectories.<sup>5</sup> However, there are both methodological and empirical gaps in organization and management research on the emergence of new industries, which business historians could help overcome.<sup>6</sup> Little is known about the moderating factors influencing industry emergence, such as the institutional conditions. There is also a need for cross-disciplinary research studies to analyze and compare industries' emergence in different geographical and institutional settings, especially in the long term. Following Mclean, Harvey, and Clegg's claim, this paper aims to improve our knowledge of the process that allows industry to emerge by

<sup>1</sup>William J. Abernathy and James M. Utterback, "Patterns of Industrial Innovation," *Technology Review* 80, no. 7 (June/July 1978): 40–47.

<sup>2</sup>Robin Gustafsson, Mikko Jääskeläinen, Markku Maula, and Juha Uotila, "Emergence of Industries: A Review and Future Directions," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 18, no. 1 (2016): 28–50.

<sup>3</sup>On the discussion of this new perspective in business history research, see Mairi Maclean, Charles Harvey, and Stewart R. Clegg, "Organization Theory in Business and Management History: Present Status and Future Prospects," *Business History Review* 91, no. 3 (Autumn 2017): 458–459.

<sup>4</sup>Albert J. Mills, Roy Suddaby, William M. Foster, and Gabrielle Durepos, "Re-visiting the Historic Turn 10 Years Later: Current Debates in Management and Organizational History—An Introduction," *Management & Organizational History* 11, no. 2 (2016): 67–76; Philip Scranton and Patrick Fridenson, *Reimagining Business History* (Baltimore, 2013).

<sup>5</sup>Maclean, Harvey, and Clegg, "Organization Theory," 468–470.

<sup>6</sup>Gustafsson, Jääskeläinen, Maula, and Uotila, "Emergence of Industries," 28–50; Daniel P. Forbes and David A. Kirsch, "The Study of Emerging Industries: Recognizing and Responding to Some Central Problems," *Journal of Business Venturing* 26, no. 5 (2011): 589–602.

merging the descriptive accounts of historians with the theoretical explanations of the emergence of new industries.

We analyze and compare the prêt-à-porter industry's emergence in France between the 1930s and 1980s and the ready-to-wear industry's emergence in Italy between the 1950s and 1980s, interpreting their long-term trajectories through an institutional theory lens. Although they appear to be synonyms, the terms prêt-à-porter and ready-to-wear identify two different pathways and historical backgrounds. Within the economic and social context of the post-World War II period, prêt-à-porter refers to the new French business of branded ready-made clothing as a spinoff of haute couture, while ready-to-wear designates products of the modern fashion industry. Italian ready-to-wear specifically refers to clothing conceived as an industrial design product.

The historically informed theoretical approach allows a look at fashion industries as socially constructed organizational fields whose emergence encompasses specific actors' roles and activities.<sup>7</sup> Trade associations such as the French *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, des Confectionneurs et des Tailleurs pour Dame* and the National Chamber of Italian Fashion, and foundational entrepreneurs such as Charles Frederick Worth, Jean Patou, Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Giovanni Battista Giorgini, Giorgio Armani, and others are among the actors that our research examines.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: the next section discusses scholarly literature on this topic. We then present the sources and methodology adopted to identify and analyze the key steps in these industries' emergence. Subsequent sections deal with the early stages of the French prêt-à-porter industry and Italian ready-to-wear industry.

The analysis and comparison illustrate the different impacts that the trade associations had on the trajectories of the fashion industry in France and in Italy. The study also unravels the Italian fashion industry's inherent weakness and its causes. From its emergence, the Italian fashion industry's identity and legitimacy have lacked institutional endorsement. The same shortcoming also affected its ready-to-wear products, whose distinctive attributes are derived from industrial qualifications rather than from institutional recognition. In the end, this comparative analysis specifically casts new light on the Italian fashion industry, which is generally applauded as an outstanding success, leading to reconsiderations of conventional wisdom.

<sup>7</sup>Paul J. Di Maggio and Walter W. Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (1983): 147–160.

## Emerging Industries: A Multidisciplinary Literature

Scholarship on emerging industries stands at the intersection of interpretative approaches that developed from questioning the evolution model of the classical industry. According to this research, patterns of firm diffusion in terms of an initial growth period followed by a shake-out, maturity, and decline characterize the industry life cycle. This sequence has been documented across a variety of industries. However, the related literature deals mainly with emerged industries rather than emerging, and with industries that emerge from technological innovations or radical scientific breakthroughs rather than from economic, sociological, and institutional changes, as in the case of cultural industries, including the fashion industry.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to the long-dominant technology-driven perspective, institutional theory has become prominent in the last decades through research in management and organizational studies—as well as more recently in business history—on the emergence and development of new industries.<sup>9</sup> The studies have shown that a search for both identity and legitimacy is the main driver of the entire process of industry emergence and configuration. More specifically, a search for identity is a search for diversity and differentiation from existing industries, which helps reduce uncertainty and enhance the industry's survival.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, a search for legitimacy is a search for identity in order to meet the socially constructed system of norms, values, and beliefs in which the new industry emerges.<sup>11</sup>

These issues are particularly salient in the case of the fashion industry, in which innovations result from a synergic change in design, aesthetics, and symbolic elements that challenge the existing order and convey value to the product.<sup>12</sup> The fashion field's cultural nature and idiosyncratic setting have fed the still ongoing proliferation of

<sup>8</sup>Gustafsson, Jääskeläinen, Maula, and Uotila, "Emergence of Industries."

<sup>9</sup>Gustafsson, Jääskeläinen, Maula, and Uotila, 39; Stephanie Decker, Behlül Üsdiken, Lars Engwall, and Michael Rowlinson, "Introduction: Historical Research on Institutional Change," *Business History* 60, no. 5 (2018): 613–627; Neil Thompson, "Hey DJ, Don't Stop the Music: Institutional Work and Record Pooling Practices in the United States' Music Industry," *Business History* 60, no. 5 (2018): 677–698; Jarmo Seppälä, "Managing the Paradox of Unwanted Efficiency: The Symbolic Legitimation of the Hypermarket Format in Finland, 1960–1975," *Business History* 60, no. 5 (2018): 699–727.

<sup>10</sup>Kai Lamertz, William M. Foster, Diego M. Coraiola, and Jochem Kroezen, "New Identities from Remnants of the Past: An Examination of the History of Beer Brewing in Ontario and the Recent Emergence of Craft Breweries," *Business History* 58, no. 5 (2016): 796–828.

<sup>11</sup>Gustafsson, Jääskeläinen, Maula, and Uotila, "Emergence of Industries," 37; Seppälä, "Managing the Paradox," 699–700.

<sup>12</sup>Mutki Khaire, *Culture and Commerce: The Value of Entrepreneurship in Creative Industries* (Stanford, 2017).

management and organization research studies that highlight the relevance of the historical socio-economic context in explaining the fashion industry's emergence and development.<sup>13</sup> Recent business history research has, however, paved the way for theoretical concerns to be integrated into the analysis of industries that emerged in the past.

Pierre-Yves Donzé's research on the emergence and achievement of the modern luxury industry, Mukti Khaire's research on the emergence of Indian high-end fashion, and Véronique Pouillard's research on the development and transition of the French fashion industry into a global business are cases in point.<sup>14</sup> Building on the theoretical framework that Robin Gustafsson, Mikko Jääskeläinen, Markku Maula, and Juha Uotila proposed, Donzé conceptualized the modern luxury industry from the mid-eighteenth century to date, as characterized by the replacement of the attribute of rarity with high quality as the distinctive feature of luxury products.<sup>15</sup>

Khaire's research is an example of using history as a driver or a moderator of the subsequent categorical configurations.<sup>16</sup> The early entrepreneurs shaped the cognitive framing in terms of the emerging field, while fashion institutes helped build the new profession's know-how and legitimacy, after which fashion magazines defined and propagated shared understandings of the industry's features and attributes. For example, the collective meaning making, which legitimized and thereafter institutionalized Indian high-end fashion, was the result of a dynamic process that developed over time and was conditioned by the existing institutions, cultural factors, and social practices.

Pouillard's study of the French fashion industry highlights the roles of entrepreneurs, institutions, and innovations in the configuration and achievement of French fashion's global hegemony, outlining it as an iterative process between new business practices, entrepreneurship, and professional fashion institutions in the dynamics of a dialectical relationship between innovation and commercialization.<sup>17</sup>

Notwithstanding this research's relevant contribution, the literature on the fashion industry is still somewhat constrained. Scholars have

<sup>13</sup> Mukti Khaire, "Fashioning an Industry: Socio-Cognitive Processes in the Construction of Worth of a New Industry," *Organization Studies* 35, no. 1 (2014): 41–74.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre-Yves Donzé, "Luxury as an Industry," in *The Oxford Handbook of Luxury Business*, ed. Pierre-Yves Donzé, Véronique Pouillard, and Joanne Roberts (Oxford, 2022), 59–78; Mukti Khaire, "The Indian Fashion Industry and Traditional Indian Crafts," *Business History Review*, 85, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 345–366; Véronique Pouillard, *Paris to New York: The Transatlantic Fashion Industry in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Gustafsson, Jääskeläinen, Maula, and Uotila, "Emergence of Industries"; Donzé, "Luxury as an Industry," 65, 73.

<sup>16</sup> Khaire, "Fashioning an Industry."

<sup>17</sup> Pouillard, *Paris to New York*.

mainly approached the topic from a country-specific, or even regional- and cluster-specific, perspective.

With regard to the Italian fashion industry, business history research attributed its emergence to the country-branding strategies that created the intangible Made in Italy asset.<sup>18</sup> Then, the synergy between the clothing industry and designers prompted the achievements of the Italian ready-to-wear market in the late 1970s and 1980s. In those years, Milan superseded the various fashion centers that aspired to be internationally recognized as the cradle of Made in Italy.<sup>19</sup> However, the Italian fashion industry still needs to be further investigated. The literature deals mainly with its huge international success rather than why it remained a niche business compared to the size and market share of the leading companies of French fashion.<sup>20</sup>

Marie-Laure Djelic and Antti Ainamo's comparison of the fashion industry's evolution in France, Italy, and the United States revealed that firms evolved by following trajectories determined by their historical powerful legacies, which were deeply embedded in their local and national institutional contexts, thus limiting their convergence potential.<sup>21</sup> Although this study was very influential, it failed to examine the industry's emerging phase. Consequently, there is room to improve the understanding of the legacies and the trajectories by analyzing the French prêt-à-porter and Italian ready-to-wear industries.

Following calls to synergistically integrate management and organization studies with business history, in this article we merge a historically informed narrative with the theoretical framework of the three key phases of emerging industries to analyze and conceptualize the emergence of the French prêt-à-porter and Italian ready-to-wear industries. Thereafter, we use an institutional theory perspective to identify and examine the role of institutions at each stage in the prêt-à-porter and ready-to-wear industries' emergence and evolution, thereby providing new insights into the primary roles of institutions beyond entrepreneurship and beyond company scale

<sup>18</sup>Valeria Pinchera and Diego Rinallo, "The Emergence of Italy as a Fashion Country: Nation Branding and Collective Meaning Creation at Florence's Fashion Shows (1951–1965)," *Business History* 62, no. 1 (2020): 151–178; Emanuela Scarpellini, *Italian Fashion Since 1945: A Cultural History* (New York, 2019).

<sup>19</sup>Elisabetta Merlo and Francesca Polese, "Turning Fashion Into Business: The Emergence of Milan as an International Fashion Hub," *Business History Review* 80, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 415–447; Elisabetta Merlo, "Size Revolution: The Industrial Foundations of the Italian Clothing Business," *Business History* 57, no. 6 (2015): 919–941.

<sup>20</sup>Donzé, "Luxury as an Industry," 66–72; Elisabetta Merlo, "Italian Fashion Business: Achievements and Challenges (1970s–2000s)," *Business History* 53, no. 3 (2011): 344–362.

<sup>21</sup>Marie-Laure Djelic and Antti Ainamo, "The Coevolution of New Organizational Forms in the Fashion Industry: A Historical and Comparative Study of France, Italy and the United States," *Organization Science* 10, no. 5 (Sept./Oct. 1999): 622–637.

and scope, and proposing a broader comparative view of the institutional trajectories of these industries.

### Historical Sources and Methods

We base our reconstruction of the industries of French prêt-à-porter and Italian ready-to-wear configurations on primary and secondary sources. For the primary sources related to the French prêt-à-porter industry, the research drew mainly on the *Women's Wear Daily* (hereafter, WWD) archive; the WWD, published since 1910, is an authoritative fashion trade journal, defined as the “bible” of fashion professionals.<sup>22</sup> Since the opening of its Paris bureau in 1911, WWD correspondents have played a key role in reporting and disseminating news on French fashion trends and business, thereby establishing a direct contact and relationship with Parisian couturiers and institutions. For the primary sources related to the Italian ready-to-wear industry, our research drew on documents in the Italian Fashion Archive of Giovanni Battista Giorgini (hereafter, the IFAGBG) and in the archives of the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (National Chamber of Italian Fashion, hereafter the CNMI). As explained later in the article, in 1951, the buyer Giorgini organized in Florence the first collective fashion show of genuinely Italian couture designs, which American buyers attended and which reached a wide international audience. Studying Giorgini's historical archive is therefore important in terms of Italian fashion's breakthrough from French fashion. The IFAGBG contains the documents of all the various shows held at the Florentine Palazzo Pitti from 1951 until 1965, which Giorgini organized and supervised. The archive provides relevant data on the strategies of the emerging Italian fashion industry as well as reports by the international press on Italy's external acceptance and recognition. The CNMI's historical archive, on the other hand covers the period between CNMI's founding (1958) and the transfer of its headquarters from Rome to Milan (1989); the latter city, at that time, was already internationally known as the Italian hub of ready-to-wear fashion. Therefore, the CNMI's archive spans the early stages of the emergence of the Italian fashion industry. The archive's inventory provides an overview of the documentation, allowing researchers to clearly distinguish two different periods. In the first one, covering the 1960s, documentation was produced and collected for institutional purposes, with the aim to create a common ground in terms of the values, actions, and beliefs of individuals, groups, and associations from different

<sup>22</sup> Janet Ozzard, “Women's Wear Daily,” in *The Berg Companion to Fashion*, ed. Valerie Steele (London, 2010), 732-734; Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 46.

cultural and productive backgrounds. The records related to this period, in which CNMI aspired to become the Italian fashion body entitled to represent Italy's overall fashion industry, mainly concerns CNMI's official capacity. Consequently, deeds, minutes of meetings, epistolary exchanges, and members' profiles are predominant in this historical archive. Thereafter, the nature of the documentation changes, with most of the records referring to the administrative organization of fashion shows. The primary sources in the CNMI's historical archive allowed us to understand the reasons behind the above-mentioned change; that is, did the CNMI achieve its original goal, or did the course of its actions change? The sources informed us about the (1) three key stages of the emergence of the Italian ready-to-wear industry, (2) the transition from one stage to the other, and (3) the role that the CNMI played in configuring the Italian fashion industry.

We integrated the primary sources with secondary literature that "provides a way to ask historically relevant questions and offers methodological clues and theoretical insights that can reconceptualize the primary sources."<sup>23</sup> This secondary literature includes publications to which we applied additional criteria to select those relevant to our research. Among the sources we gathered and reviewed critically were those published from the 1990s onward, which comprise classic works on the subject; and we explicitly considered "the inter-dependence of fashion with industrial, institutional, and commercial organization."<sup>24</sup>

The aim in our analytic strategy is to uncover the sequences and to synthesize the complex processes related to the emergence of the French prêt-à-porter and Italian ready-to-wear industries, from their initial stage to the growth stage. The intermediate, co-evolutionary stage includes four sub-processes, each related to technology, markets, activity networks, and industry identity development. Given the fashion industry's cultural nature and idiosyncratic setting, we regard technology development as a

<sup>23</sup> Kenneth Lipartito, "Historical Sources and Data," in *Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods*, ed. Marcelo Bucheli and Daniel R. Wadhvani (Oxford, 2013), 292.

<sup>24</sup> Luigi Fontana and José A. Miranda, "The Business of Fashion in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century," *Investigaciones de Historia Económica-Economic History Research* 12, no. 2 (June 2016): 68-75, 69. See also Regina L. Blaszczyk, "Rethinking Fashion," in *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*, ed. Regina L. Blaszczyk (Philadelphia, 2008), 9; Regina L. Blaszczyk and Véronique Pouillard, "Fashion as Enterprise," in *European Fashion: The Creation of a Global Industry*, ed. Regina L. Blaszczyk and Véronique Pouillard (Manchester, 2018), 1-32. With classic works, we refer to milestones in the fashion literature, such as Elizabeth A. Coleman, *The Opulent Era: Fashions of Worth, Doucet and Pingat* (New York, 1989); Diana De Marly, *The History of Haute Couture: 1850-1950* (New York, 1980); Philippe Perrot, *Les dessous et les dessous de la bourgeoisie: une histoire du vêtement au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1981), as well as more recent books that have strongly innovated the field of fashion studies, such as Carlo M. Belfanti, *Civiltà della moda* (Bologna, 2017); Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (Oxford, 2004).



broader competence-enhancing knowledge discontinuity characterized by a synergic change in technology, design, manufacturing processes, and business and service practices that challenge the existing order and provide a product with additional value.<sup>25</sup>

### The French Prêt-à-Porter Industry's Emergence (1930s–1980s)

Recent management and business history research ascribes the origin of the luxury fashion industry to the legacy of Parisian haute couture's traditions and business practices, configuring new French luxury holdings, such as LVMH and Kering, as distinctive features of this industry.<sup>26</sup> During the long process that led haute couture to evolve into luxury, the prêt-à-porter industry's emergence and development were crucial intermediate steps.<sup>27</sup>

According to fashion historians, haute couture's birth dates back to the mid-nineteenth century. The House of Worth was the epitome of the French *maison*, paving the way for a new business model. Worth opened his fashion house in 1858, innovating fashion practices and business. He was the first to (1) supply fabrics and trimmings to make his garments, (2) provide a complete outfit by complementing clothes with accessories, (3) to show the fashion collections on living mannequins biannually, and (4) to label clothes with his signature. He was not the only designer in Paris to adopt these new methods. However, his aggressive and effective self-promotion as well as his innovative and technical capabilities earned him the title of the father of haute couture. Worth and his colleagues participated in the founding of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture, des Confectionneurs et des Tailleurs pour Dame* (Chamber Syndical of Couture, Clothing Manufacturers and Tailors for Women, hereafter Chamber). The Chamber was founded as “an umbrella organization to support and promote individual couture houses and Paris couturiers as a collective.”<sup>28</sup> In 1911, the Chamber was re-formed. The new *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*

<sup>25</sup> Khaire, “Fashioning an Industry”; Khaire, *Culture and Commerce*; Pouillard, *Paris to New York*.

<sup>26</sup> Christian Barrère and Walter Santagata, *La Mode. Une économie de la créativité et du patrimoine à l'heure du marché* (Paris, 2005), 235–258; Djelic and Ainamo, “Coevolution of New Organizational Forms”; Pierre-Yves Donzé, “The Birth of Luxury Big Business: LVMH, Richemont and Kering,” in *Global Luxury: Organizational Change and Emerging Markets Since the 1970s*, ed. Pierre-Yves Donzé and Rika Fujioka (New York, 2018), 19–38; Pierre-Yves Donzé and Ben Wubs, “LVMH: Storytelling and Organizing Creativity in Luxury and Fashion,” in *European Fashion*, 63–85; Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 230–234.

<sup>27</sup> Błaszczuk and Pouillard, “Fashion as Enterprise,” 13–15; Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 213–215.

<sup>28</sup> Alexandra Palmer, *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s* (Vancouver, 2001), 14.

conclusively established haute couture as an autonomous business and a profession distinct from that of *confection en gros* (large-scale clothing manufacturers).<sup>29</sup>

The haute couture industry reached its peak in the 1920s, thanks to the international success of couturiers such as Patou and Chanel. They respectively employed 1,500 and 2,500 workers in their workshops at this time.<sup>30</sup> In 1925, couture represented 15 percent of the French total export, while clothing was the second-ranked French export.<sup>31</sup> Following the 1929 stock market crash, the reversal in the economic trend affected the haute couture business severely. Between 1929 and 1930, American buyers' purchases, which represented about 60 percent of the total haute couture sales, fell 65 to 70 percent.<sup>32</sup> More than 800 couture houses and about 2,650 other clothing firms failed between 1929 and 1933.<sup>33</sup>

In 1936, the French clothing industry employed roughly 749,500 workers, about half of the 1906 labor force, while apparel fell to the twenty-seventh place as a French export.<sup>34</sup> In the same year, the Matignon agreements introduced significant social and labor reforms, such as the workweek reduction to forty hours and a wage increase, resulting in haute couture experiencing a substantial increase in its costs.<sup>35</sup> The crisis reached its apex in 1940, when the Germans occupied France. The early stages of the prêt-à-porter industry's development are rooted in this difficult scenario.

*The initial stage (1930s).* The existing industrial order was disrupted by sequential initiatives in the 1930s. In 1930, the Chamber took action to support and safeguard the knowhow of the Parisian couture tradition by creating a school to train female workers for the main haute couture's business aspects and by adopting initiatives for the protection of the intellectual property rights of haute couture's designs and creations.<sup>36</sup> Thereafter, a new generation of couturiers updated their

<sup>29</sup> Didier Grumbach, *Histoire de la mode* (Paris, 2008), 31.

<sup>30</sup> Mary L. Stewart, *Dressing Modern Frenchwomen: Marketing Haute Couture, 1919–1939* (Baltimore, 2008), 81; Johanna Zanon, "La face cachée de la Lune: les ateliers de couture de la maison Jean Patou dans l'entre-deux-guerres," *Apparence(s)* 7 (2017): 3.

<sup>31</sup> Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 72; Nancy Green, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham, 1997), 81.

<sup>32</sup> Mary L. Stewart, "Copying and Copyrighting Haute Couture: Democratizing Fashion, 1900–1930s," *French Historical Studies* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 112–133.

<sup>33</sup> Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 74; "Dissolution of Jane Paris Listed," *WWD*, 20 Jan. 1930, 2; "Jenny Profit Fall Laid To Stock Crash," *WWD*, 18 April 1930, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Tihomir J. Markovitch, *L'industrie française de 1789 à 1964. Analyse des faits* (Genève, 1966), 164. Grumbach, *Histoire de la mode*, 43; Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 73; "Drastic Action Urged To Spur French Export," *WWD*, 17 Dec. 1929, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 105–106.

<sup>36</sup> Pouillard, 103; "Outlines Scope of New Couture 'High School,'" *WWD*, 22 July 1930, 24; "Paris École Supérieure de la Couture Now in Second Year Defines Scope of Purposes and Activities," *WWD*, 4 Dec. 1931, 4–5; Pouillard, "Managing Fashion Creativity. The History of

business model by venturing into ready-made clothing, accessories (especially perfumes), and product licensing on the US market in an effort to cope with the adverse economic conditions and the effects of the Matignon agreements.<sup>37</sup> Among this new generation, Elsa Schiaparelli was the first woman fashion designer featured on *Time* magazine's cover in 1934.<sup>38</sup> In the same year, Lucien Lelong launched the ready-made line Robes d'Édition, which was shown and sold separately from haute couture.<sup>39</sup> In 1935, Schiaparelli opened a store, the Boutique Schiap, within her new couture house, which sold everything from perfumes to accessories and from bijoux to ready-made fashion.<sup>40</sup> At the time, garment manufacturing was a still rather insignificant sector of the French fashion system, both in terms of the markets and the workers, because only 25 percent of French women wore these products and it officially had only about 80,000 employees.<sup>41</sup> In 1935, the French Ministry of Industry sent Lucien Lelong to study the American clothing industry, anticipating the postwar developments in knowledge, markets, activity networks, and industry identity.

*The co-evolutionary stage (mid-1940s–1970s).* Fashion studies research characterizes Dior as a typical case of the development of French fashion knowledge in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> Dior created his haute couture house in 1946 with the textile (cotton) entrepreneur Marcel Boussac's financial support. The launch of his first collection in February 1947 was quite successful, catching the eye of buyers and the specialist press. In 1948, Dior opened an American branch on Fifth Avenue, in New York City, which was aimed at the ready-made and accessories business, exploiting the large American market's opportunities: the most important marketplace at the time.<sup>43</sup> From 1949 onward, the branch entered into licensing agreements with local manufacturers to produce its ready-made clothing, and it also expanded to Mexico, Cuba, Canada, and Australia.

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the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne During the Interwar Period," *Investigaciones de Historia Económica - Economic History Research*, 12, no. 2 (June 2016): 76–89.

<sup>37</sup>Véronique Pouillard and Johanna Zanon, "Wholesale Couture: Jean Patou's Jane Paris Line (1929)," *Dress* 46, no. 1 (2020): 53–65; Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 75–81.

<sup>38</sup>"Business Haute Couture," *Time*, 13 Aug. 1934, 50.

<sup>39</sup>Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 80; "Lelong Opens 'Department d'Édition,'" *WWD*, 9 Oct. 1934, 1.

<sup>40</sup>Marylaura Papalas, "Fashion in Interwar France: The Urban Vision of Elsa," *French Cultural Studies* 28, no. 2 (May 2017): 163–164.

<sup>41</sup>Grumbach, *Histoire de la mode*, 178.

<sup>42</sup>Véronique Pouillard, "Recasting Paris Fashion: Haute Couture and Design Management in the Post-War Era," in *European Fashion*, 38.

<sup>43</sup>Alexandra Palmer, *Dior: A New Look, A New Enterprise 1947–57* (London, 2009), 78.

The overseas branches operated separately from Maison Dior in Paris, developing products for the local markets' taste and requirements. Dior's new business model also included establishing subsidiaries in France, which produced and commercialized a large variety of lines: perfumes and fur (1947), ties and shoes (1950), hosiery (1951), and menswear (1954). Dior successfully turned the haute couture model into a global business by means of a divisional structure business model. Dior's global use of brand licensing was based on the fashion business's diversification, both horizontally (into a wide variety of products) and vertically (into segmented markets to exploit the emerging middle-class market).<sup>44</sup> Consequently, the Maison Dior business model evolved into a multinational corporation. By 1957, Dior's huge business accounted for 50 percent of the total haute couture export trade, and 5 percent of overall French exports.<sup>45</sup> Despite the early death of its founder, Maison Dior managed to overcome the economic turmoil of the 1970s and the haute couture downturn, which forced numerous couture houses to close their doors.<sup>46</sup> Today, Maison Dior is a branch of the Dior group controlled by LVMH Holding, and—along with Balmain, Chanel, Givenchy, Lanvin, and Schiaparelli—is one of the few couture houses still in existence, revived thanks to new ownership and new creative direction.<sup>47</sup>

It would be hard to imagine Christian Dior successfully turning his haute couture house into a global business without the dynamics that affected international trade during the second half of the twentieth century. Between the 1950s and 1970s, Western countries experienced great economic and social changes. With incomes increasing around the world, there was a general shift toward industrial goods in world production and trade.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, post–World War II trade policies increased the size of international markets. The larger the market for products, the more the trade was based on a scale advantage rather than on a comparative advantage, therefore benefitting larger firms.

Following the transition from haute couture to prêt-à-porter, activity networks also evolved.

<sup>44</sup>Tomoko Okawa, "Licensing Practices at Maison Christian Dior," in *Producing Fashion*, 88–90.

<sup>45</sup>Palmer, *Dior*, 45, and "Figures Given on Operations of Dior Firm," *WWD*, 2 June 1957, 37.

<sup>46</sup>Yet in the 1960s, the haute couture business of Dior was in deficit, and it was mainly sustained by the sales of accessories and licenses. See Tomoko Okawa, "La Maison Christian Dior, Modèle de Référence pour les Années 1960," in *La Mode des Sixties. L'Entrée dans la Modernité*, ed. Dominique Veillon and Michèle Ruffat (Paris, 2007), 15.

<sup>47</sup>Delphine Dion, "How to Manage Heritage Brands: The Case of Sleeping Beauties," in *The Oxford Handbook of Luxury Business*, 273–286.

<sup>48</sup>Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (Princeton, 2007), 509–511.

As Table 1 shows, the Chamber initially lobbied for political intervention to favor haute couture and actually succeeded in securing and protecting the haute couture legacy. The distinction between the couture and the categories of *couture-cr ation* paved the way for configuration of the haute couture industry as the backbone of the luxury industry.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, the number of haute couture houses declined steadily, from 106 in 1946 to 19 in 1967.<sup>50</sup> This trend signaled that the industry's identity and field configuration developments were in progress. It was no coincidence that, in the late 1940s, the term *pr t- porter* was officially adopted in France instead of the common expression *confection* (ready-made) to distinguish the emerging labeled clothing industry.<sup>51</sup>

The turning point in the transition from haute couture to *pr t- porter* occurred in 1959 when Pierre Cardin, without the Chamber's endorsement, showed his *pr t- porter* line at the department store Printemps.<sup>52</sup> Well-known couturiers, such as Yves Saint Laurent (1965), Andr  Courreges (1967), and Emanuel Ungaro (1967) imitated Cardin's move, which revolutionized the long-established couture commercial strategy by directly marketing and selling updated and affordable high fashion lines.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, beyond the haute couture system, a new generation of designers, or *cr ateurs de style*, took their first direct steps to *pr t- porter*: Jean Cacharel, Daniel Hechter, Mich le Rosier, and Emmanuelle Khanh. All of them challenged the Parisian fashion cluster's traditional rules by expanding a manufacturing model essentially based on licensing and outsourcing.

Notwithstanding the haute couture paradigm and the production system's downturn during the 1950s and 1960s, the Paris haute couture cluster improved its strategic role by means of *pr t- porter* spin-off lines. The new system did not, however, replace the haute couture conventions and rules, instead extending its prestigious value and

<sup>49</sup> Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 143–144; Alice K. Perkins, "Paris Maintains Prestige: Plagued by Govt. Interference, Shortages and Many Other Problems, Couture Is Confident," *WWD*, 26 Dec. 1946, 118.

<sup>50</sup> Fran ois-Marie Grau, *La haute couture* (Paris, 2000), 120–122; Yuniya Kawamura, "The Japanese Revolution in Paris Fashion," *Fashion Theory* 8, no. 2 (April 2004): 195–233, 218.

<sup>51</sup> Fabienne Falluel, "Paris-Confection. Ann es 30," in *Per una storia della moda pronta. Problemi e ricerca* (Florence, 1991), 276; Green, *Ready to Wear and Ready to Work*, 101; Alexis Romano, "Elle and the Development of *Stylisme* in 1960s Paris," *Costume* 46, no. 1 (2012): 75–91.

<sup>52</sup> Blaszczyk and Pouillard, "Fashion as Enterprise," 1. Cardin launched his first ready-to-wear models in 1958 under the label Pierre Cardin Jeunesse Paris. See "Mushrooms Collars Appear on Cardin Wholesale Styles," *WWD*, 10 Dec. 1958, 4.

<sup>53</sup> "Yves St. Laurent Rive Gauche: St. Laurent Starts a Paris Couture Revolution. Yves Has Hurdled the Cobblestone at Tradition," *WWD*, 11 Oct. 1965, 4; Gerry Y. Dryansky, "Ungaro Fires Blast At Paris Ready-to-Wear Rules," *WWD*, 8 Nov. 1967, 1.

*Table 1*  
Activity Network Development during the Prêt-à-Porter Industry's Co-evolutionary Stage (Mid-1940s–1970s)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Description</i>
1945	Establishment of the Office professionnel des industries et métiers d'art et de création (Professional Office of Industries, and Artistic Craft and Creation) by ministerial decree issued on January 29, which included haute couture in the list of art and creation industries and crafts by legally categorizing it as couture-cr�ation. This distinction recognized haute couture as an artistic and creative profession that, however, had to respect the strict rules and requirements that a designated commission of the Chamber set and monitored (minister decree issued on 20 April). Each year, a dedicated commission under the aegis of the Ministry of Industry selected companies eligible to join the Chamber.
1952–1957	The Chamber lobbied to have the new law, Saunier, against counterfeiting of creations of Industries saisonni�eres de la parure et de l'habillement (Seasonal Industries of Clothing and Articles of Fashion) approved on March 12, 1952. Subsequently, the Chamber took steps to ensure that the new law on la propri�et� litt�raire et artistique (artistic and literary property), decreed on March 11, 1957, included applied arts such as fashion design, thereby making France the country with the strictest legislation against counterfeiting.
1952–1961	Preserving the haute couture cluster and reinforcing the long-term links between French haute couture and textile industries were the primary aims of the "Aide textile" (textile help) program, which was intended to support haute couture houses financially by covering 30–40 percent of the textile costs between 1952 and 1961.
1954	As early as 1947, the couturier Lelong and the perfumer Jean-Jacques Guerlain conceived a new association aimed at preserving and promoting French products' reputation for high quality in the face of new challenges. The Comit� Colbert was established in 1954. Among the 15 original members were high-class jewelry firms, gourmet cuisine businesses, the hotel trade, and haute couture houses. In 1984, the 61 members of the association included representatives of champagne, leather goods, perfume, and cosmetics firms. From 1959 onward, the Comit� lobbied public authorities to have intellectual property rights protected.
1957	In 1957, the Chamber, on the initiative of its member Jacques Heim, established the Pr�t-�porter cr�ation Association (Ready-to-Wear Creation Association), which was aimed at promoting the new "top quality" ready-to-wear clothing "created and signed" by a group of Parisian couturiers, such as Marie-Louise Carven, Jean Dess�s, Nina Ricci, and Heim himself, to enhance and dignify the emerging business, thereby creating a direct connection with the couture-cr�ation category.

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Year	Description
1973	Pierre Bergé, co-founder of the Yves Saint Laurent house, created the <i>Chambre syndicale du prêt-à-porter des couturiers et des créateurs de mode</i> (Chamber Syndical of Ready-to-Wear Fashion and Fashion Designers), which joined the <i>Chambre syndicale de la haute couture</i> under the newly established umbrella of the <i>Fédération française de la couture, du prêt-à-porter des couturiers et des créateurs de mode</i> (French Federation of Fashion, Ready-to-Wear Fashion Couturiers and Fashion Designers), thus de facto confirming and recognizing the new categorization and broadening of the French fashion system.

Sources: Barrère and Santagata, *La mode. Une économie de la créativité et du patrimoine, à l'heure du marché* (Paris, 2005), Louis Bergeron, *Les industries du luxe en France* (Paris, 1998), 102–103; “Chambre Syndicale Endorses Joint Apparel Show,” *WWD*, 16 Apr. 1957, 4; Comité Colbert, *Rapport annuel. Comité Colbert en 2014* (Paris, 2014), 24–28, 36–39, 50–51; Pierre-Yves Donzé and Véronique Pouillard, “Luxury,” in *Routledge Companion to the Makers of Global Business*, ed. Teresa da Silva Lopes, Christina Lubinski, and Heidi J. S. Tworek (New York, 2019), 424–437; Vincent Dubé-Sénécal, “Fashion, Industry and Diplomacy: Reframing Couture-Textile Relations in France, 1950s–1960s,” *Enterprise & Society* 24, no. 2 (June 2023): 455–479; Grumbach, *Histoire de la mode; Journal Officiel de la République*, 29 Jan. 1945, 426–427; *Journal Officiel de la République*, 6 Apr. 1945, 1920–1921; “National Subsidy for Paris Couture to End by 1962,” *WWD*, 21 Feb. 1961, 1, 47; Palmer, *Couture & Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s* (Vancouver, 2001); Pouillard, “Managing Fashion Creativity. The History of the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne* During the Interwar Period,” *Investigaciones de Historia Económica - Economic History Research*, 12, no. 2 (June 2016): 76–89; “Paris Prêt-à-Porter Création,” *WWD*, 13 Nov. 1957, 6; Pouillard, *Paris to New York*; “Subsidy Loss Is Threatening Paris Couture,” *WWD*, 7 Apr. 1960, 1; David Zajtmann, “Une révolution dans la mode: le prêt-à-porter des couturiers parisiens (1965–2000),” *Entreprises et Histoire* 108, no. 3 (2022): 52–63.

symbolic capital, whose legacy the new artistic property law ensured.<sup>54</sup> From the late 1960s onward, given their slump, Paris haute couture houses reinvented themselves as creative laboratories for the more profitable business of prêt-à-porter, hinging their production on outsourcing and licensing agreements.<sup>55</sup>

*Growth stage (1980s).* The new dynamics and changes in the consumer market in the 1980s profoundly affected the fashion business model in France and beyond. Consumers became creators of their own fashion style by fostering market segmentation. Subsequently, the globalization phase, which introduced strong competition from low-wage countries in Asia, particularly China, impacted the French textile-clothing supply chain’s structure and legacy, forcing fashion companies to redesign

<sup>54</sup>Pouillard, “Recasting Paris Fashion,” 54; Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 192.

<sup>55</sup>“Industries Hiking Range of French Couture-Heim,” *WWD*, 11 Apr. 1960, 7; Dryansky, “The Couture: Alive and Well in Paris,” *WWD*, 3 Feb. 1972, 28.

their strategies and organizational structures.<sup>56</sup> The new scenario emphasized the crucial role that the supply chain's intangible assets, such as distribution, marketing, and branding, played.<sup>57</sup> In addition to this functional upgrade, the French fashion system diversified its product portfolios, focusing on the high-end market segment. This industrial transition resulted in large conglomerates being established as a result of the acquisition of and merger with numerous fashion companies as well as the capital resources that the financial markets provided.<sup>58</sup> The achievements of the LVMH and Kering holdings are regarded as a "logical" extension and legacy of the haute couture system's long product diversification and licensing tradition, which couturiers had initiated in the 1930s, and which Dior had developed in the 1950s.<sup>59</sup> According to Djelic and Ainamo, "it is thus not surprising that a peculiar conglomerate or holding company such as LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) would emerge in that [French] industry."<sup>60</sup>

The French fashion system capitalized on the haute couture heritage by developing a new business model built on the luxury globalization and on the luxury massification concept, which the Fédération française de la couture supervised and the Comité Colbert endorsed.<sup>61</sup> During the long process that allowed haute couture to evolve into luxury, the prêt-à-porter search for diversity and legitimacy was inextricably linked to the institutional setting. Diversity emerged from challenging French mainstream fashion, thus causing institutional change. Legitimacy depended on fully becoming part of institutional change, thereby forcing the existent system of norms, values, and beliefs to adapt to knowledge and market development's outcome.

### The Emergence of the Italian Ready-to-Wear Industry (1950s–1980s)

After World War II, the unfavorable context that had, until then, frustrated any attempt to establish an Italian fashion independent from foreign production and taste began to change. Italy was among the chief

<sup>56</sup> Dominique Jacomet, *Mode, textile et mondialisation* (Paris, 2007), 191–196.

<sup>57</sup> Hubert Bonin, "A Reassessment of the Business History of the French Luxury Sector: The Emergence of a New Business Model and Renewed Corporate Image," in *European Business and Brand Building*, ed. Luciano Segreto, Hubert Bonin, Andrzej K. Kozminski, Carles Manera, and Manfred Pohl (Bruxelles, 2012), 119–120; Donzé, "Luxury as an Industry," 11–12.

<sup>58</sup> Hubert Bonin, "Luxury, Banking, and Finance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Luxury Business*, 79–106; Donzé and Pouillard, "Luxury," 425.

<sup>59</sup> Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 216.

<sup>60</sup> Djelic and Ainamo, "Coevolution of New Organizational Forms," 629.

<sup>61</sup> Pouillard, *Paris to New York*, 233; Peter McNeil and Giorgio Riello, *Luxury: A Rich History* (Oxford, 2016), 231; Barrère and Santagata, *La mode*, 248–251; Mark Honigsbaum, "Comité Colbert Updating France's Luxuries," *WWD*, 25 Jan. 1989, 17; "Comité Colbert Sets French Promotion," *WWD*, May 27, 1992, 19.



beneficiaries of Marshall Plan aid (1948–1952). This American aid allowed the textile industry to initiate an intensive process of technological modernization and to integrate itself vertically into the manufacture of ready-made garments, which, according to the first postwar industrial census, was still in its infancy in Italy. The majority of firms were individual businesses. Only a handful of firms had the skills and capabilities to adopt mass-production methods.<sup>62</sup> The American aid programs were also the means of spreading the credo of productivity, which underpinned the Marshall Plan throughout Western Europe, changing production methods and consumption models.<sup>63</sup> In the postwar political and economic climate, there was also room for initiatives such as the one that fashion historians regard as the birth of Italian fashion and which they attribute to Giorgini. As noted earlier in this article, in 1951 he organized the first collective Italian fashion show in Florence, which was attended by prominent American department store buyers.<sup>64</sup>

Giorgini was a buyer who had already tackled the US market in the 1920s by exporting handmade Tuscan products. Numerous studies have commemorated him as the father of Italian fashion, a pioneer of framing Italian fashion in the image of the Renaissance artistic creativity by means of the continuity myth, and a successful promoter of Italian creations on the American market. Historians also refer to a few other entrepreneurs of that time, such as Emilio Pucci, Salvatore Ferragamo, and Guccio Gucci, as Italian fashion's co-founders.<sup>65</sup> They, like Giorgini, were all based in Florence, the cradle of the Renaissance, and were very well acquainted with the American market.

In keeping with fashion historians' narrative, we assume that the initial stage of the emergence of the Italian ready-to-wear industry dates to the early 1950s.

*Initial stage (end of WWII–1950s).* The collective fashion show of genuinely Italian couture designs that Giorgini organized in 1951 was a breakthrough, establishing Italian fashion as independent of French

<sup>62</sup> Elisabetta Merlo, "Le origini della moda italiana," in *La moda*, ed. Carlo M. Belfanti and Fabio Giusberti (Turin, 2003), 670–681.

<sup>63</sup> Nick Tiratsoo and Jim Tomlinson, "Exporting the 'Gospel of Productivity': United States Technical Assistance and British Industry, 1945–1960," *Business History Review* 71, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 41–81; Merlo, "Size Revolution."

<sup>64</sup> The first fashion show took place in Giorgini's residence, Villa Torrigiani, while the second and third editions were, due to American buyers' increasing attendance, moved to Grand Hotel. From July 1952, the shows were finally relocated to the White Hall of Pitti Palace. These moves were part of "Giorgini's nation branding strategy [that] was multifaceted and remarkably innovative in comparison with those adopted by other Italian fashion promotion organizations." Pinchera and Rinallo, "Emergence of Italy," 160–161.

<sup>65</sup> Valeria Pinchera, *La moda in Italia e in Toscana dalle origini alla globalizzazione* (Venice, 2009), 287–302.

fashion. By accepting Giorgini's invitation, the Italian fashion houses ended the custom of presenting their shows individually, each in its own atelier. They also ended the custom of scheduling their own shows a few weeks after the French ones and instead developed their own ideas autonomously instead of working from the new trends launched on the catwalks of Paris.<sup>66</sup> Nothing was left to chance to underline this show's novelty. Even the date was planned to shortly follow the French fashion dates to entice American buyers to prolong their stay in Europe and visit Florence. The Sala Bianca of the famous Florentine Palazzo Pitti evoked the Renaissance, reviving the origins of Italian aesthetic and artistic culture that made Italian fashion one of a kind.<sup>67</sup> Not by chance, *Time* magazine titled its article welcoming Italian fashion "Italy's Renaissance," providing its American readers with a detailed account of the Florentine show.<sup>68</sup>

The Florentine shows challenged the existing order. They called into question Paris's as yet undisputed status as the unrivaled capital of Western fashion. Affordable and "excellent," "elaborate," and informal, the Italian fashion conveyed the gospel of democracy to a wide cohort of influencers, including designers, buyers, journalists, and an international audience.<sup>69</sup> In other words, the Florentine shows prompted the collective meaning making that provided the new-born Italian fashion with diversity from the French haute couture, which was imbued with exclusivity and elitism.<sup>70</sup> Italian fashion's legitimacy arose from the strong consonance between the democratic ideals and the system of norms, values, and beliefs that emerged from the postwar Western political order.

Given these premises, the questions arise: How did the disruption of the existing order that the Florentine shows set in motion trigger the development of the market, knowledge, and activity networks? And how did these co-evolve, shaping the industry identity and field configuration? The following paragraph answers these questions by focusing on the emergence of the co-evolutionary stage of the Italian ready-to-wear industry.

<sup>66</sup> Letter of invitation by Giorgini to Italian fashion houses, Album 3, no. 20, Italian Fashion Archive of Giovanni Battista Giorgini, Florence, Italy (IFAGBG).

<sup>67</sup> Carlo M. Belfanti, "Renaissance and 'Made in Italy': Marketing Italian Fashion Through History (1949–1952)," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 20, no. 1 (2015): 53–66.

<sup>68</sup> "Italy's Renaissance," *Time*, 4 Feb. 1952, 68.

<sup>69</sup> As reported by the leading fashion editor Carmel Snow in numerous articles in the Giorgini Archive: Carmel Snow, "Italian Designers Grand Entrance," *New York Journal*, 26 Aug. 1951, IFAGBG, Album 1, n. 50; Carmel Snow, "Italian Fashion Have a Real Meaning," *New York Journal*, 15 Feb. 1952, and Carmel Snow "Dresses Shows Originality of Style and Fabric," *New York Journal*, 16 Feb. 1952, Album 9, n. 9 and n. 15 (respectively), IFAGBG.

<sup>70</sup> Carmel Snow, "Italy Gets Dressed Up: A Big Hectic Fashion Show Attracts U.S. Style Leaders, Poses a Challenge to Paris," *Life*, 20 Aug. 1951, Album 1, n. 49, IFAGBG; Henry Gaggiottini, "Italians Accent Simplicity in Bid for Fashion Lead," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 Oct. 1952, Album 5, n. 160, IFAGBG.

*Co-evolutionary stage (1960s–1970s)*. Starting with market developments, the first collective fashion show of Italian couture designers held in Florence in 1951 is deemed to have opened the door for the long-lasting partnership between Italian couturieres and American department stores, which fostered Italian fashion's development. In the short term, however, the Florentine shows revealed the gap between market opportunities and the capacity for Italian manufacturing to fully exploit them.

Although American manufacturers catered to all levels of the ready-made clothing market, there was no large-scale production at the top end. This market expanded in the postwar years, revealing a niche that Italy was well placed to fill, at least potentially.<sup>71</sup> The quality and taste of Italian production were beyond question. Its competitiveness relied on the cost of labor, which was lower than in any other industrialized country. Nevertheless, Italian production was a handicraft production mainly comprising accessories and knitwear. The kind of items on the Florentine catwalks were still largely (although not exclusively) the result of highly trained tailors and seamstresses engaged in manual activities in small-scale laboratories rather than in large-scale industrial production. Giorgini himself never made—and probably was not interested in making—the shift from artisan to industrial production. Even though this might be perceived as odd from an *ex post* perspective, Giorgini's attachment to artisan products comes as no surprise, given that he was a professional buyer who specialized in artisan products that constituted a large part of Florence's and central Italy's output. In addition, the productive structures comprised small-scale laboratories and workshops, with hardly any large companies.<sup>72</sup>

The importance of exploiting the American market became even clearer during the early 1960s. The large and rich American market was a way to overcome the obstacles hindering the Italian clothing industry's development; namely, the small domestic market and the low national income. The American market was therefore the primary motor for the Italian clothing industry's growth, which, to a lesser extent, benefitted from the creation of the European Economic Community in 1957. Italy's European counterparts introduced country-specific systems of sizes, which acted as effective non-duty barriers, making entering their domestic markets difficult.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Nicola White, *Reconstructing Italian Fashion: America and the Development of the Italian Fashion Industry* (Oxford, 2000), 42; Pinchera and Rinallo, "Emergence of Italy," 162–164; Sonnet Stanfill, "Anonymous Tastemakers: The Role of American Buyers in Establishing an Italian Fashion Industry, 1950–1955," in *European Fashion*, 145–169.

<sup>72</sup>Pinchera, *La moda in Italia*, 128–129.

<sup>73</sup>Merlo, "Size Revolution," 927.

From the early 1960s onward, the rise of the national market was impressive. A huge increase in income fueled an unprecedented boom in consumption, with income being spent on a larger variety of goods, including those that the Italian population deemed symbols of the modern way of living, such as ready-to-wear clothing, specifically menswear. Although the impact of clothing expenditures on the total household budget decreased from 10.5 percent in 1950 to 8.9 percent in 1970, its amount increased considerably in absolute terms, bringing Italy closer to the average of the most advanced Western countries.<sup>74</sup>

Market development prompted technology development. Since the mid-1950s, a handful of Italian textile firms vertically integrated into the clothing business, introduced mass production based on a new system of sizes, adopted the latest technologies for cutting multiple layers of cloth, and started to use modern pressing machines.<sup>75</sup> Technology development was, however, part of a competence-enhancing knowledge discontinuity characterized by a synergic change in technology, design, manufacturing processes, and business and service practices. This kind of discontinuity took the form of collaborations between industrial firms and fashion designers. Advertising campaigns in the major fashion media allow us to infer that, in the early 1960s, collaborations between industrial firms and fashion designers only occurred occasionally. Thereafter, these collaborations became more and more frequent, changing profoundly. Initially, textile firms financed the couturiers, but obliging them to use their fabrics. The partnerships subsequently evolved, with clothing production increasingly involving creative skills. This change ultimately subverted the power relationships between the fashion designers and the industry, with the former licensing fashion brands to the latter.<sup>76</sup> The leading clothing company GFT, which would later become Armani's industrial partner, was the first to experiment with collaborations with fashion designers from the early 1960s onward.<sup>77</sup> At the end of that decade, the neologism "stylist" entered fashion's lexicon, signaling the advent of a new generation of fashion designers and heralding Milan's ascendance as the Italian fashion hub.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Pinchera, *La moda in Italia*, 209.

<sup>75</sup> Elisabetta Merlo, *Moda italiana. Storia di un'industria dall'Ottocento ad oggi* (Venice, 2003), 83–90; Merlo, "Size Revolution," 922.

<sup>76</sup> For a more detailed analysis of these phases, see Merlo, "Le origini della moda italiana," 688–692.

<sup>77</sup> Elisabetta Merlo and Mario Perugini, "Making Italian Fashion Global: Brand Building and Management at Gruppo Finanziario Tessile (1950s-1990s)," *Business History* 62, no. 1 (2020): 10–13.

<sup>78</sup> Merlo and Polese, "Turning Fashion," 415–447; Ivan Paris, "Fashion as a System: Changes in Demand as the Basis for the Establishment of the Italian Fashion System (1960–1970)," *Enterprise & Society* 11, no. 3 (Sep. 2010): 549–555.

This new kind of human capital was crucial for firms to react to the industrial crisis in the 1970s and to cope with the changes in the clothing consumption models.

Market and knowledge development occurred largely independently of activity network development. As Table 2 shows, between the mid-1940s and the early 1960s, associations comprising couturiers, entrepreneurs, and economic organization representatives proliferated, reflecting the plurality of the alleged Italian capitals of fashion.<sup>79</sup> However, the capitals' competition fed parochial rivalries, preventing the associations from representing Italian fashion effectively in the international arena. The number of buyers and press attending the Pitti fashion shows did, however, increase considerably, reaching six hundred people from thirteen countries in 1959; nevertheless, the competitive moves by other Italian fashion organizations resulted in some well-known haute couture and boutique fashion designers withdrawing from the Florentine fashion shows, increasingly undermining the shows' prominence and image.<sup>80</sup>

As Table 2 shows, the various networking activities culminated in the CNMI's founding. The established associations adhered to this aim, thus becoming an active part of the main debate on classifying fashion into product categories and planning fashion shows. The shared idea behind the debate was to avoid competition among Italian fashion hubs. To do so, each association had to organize fashion shows that would display a specific category of fashion. The first version of the CNMI show had two legally determined main categories: high fashion houses and boutique fashion houses.<sup>81</sup> The definitions and rules of subcategories, such as fashion tailors and knitwear boutiques, were derived from the rules of the main categories. This scheme had been conceived to balance the economic interests of both Rome and Florence, which would thereafter respectively host the high fashion shows and the boutique fashion shows. Boutique fashion consisted of women's casual clothing and sportswear, such as knitwear, pants, blouses, sweaters, skirts, jumpsuits, skiwear, and beachwear handcrafted in small batches and in predefined measurements.<sup>82</sup> Predictably, the equilibrium soon proved precarious. In 1965, the Centro Romano Alta Moda Italiano organized both high fashion and *alta moda boutique* (high boutique fashion)

<sup>79</sup> Pinchera and Rinaldo, "Emergence of Italy," 157–159; "Italy: The Organizational Eye," *WWD*, 27 Dec. 1960, 14 and 21.

<sup>80</sup> Pinchera and Rinaldo, "Emergence of Italy," 161.

<sup>81</sup> CNMI Bylaw, 29 Sep. 1962, Box 3-1, CNMI. The term boutique was not mentioned in the Camera sindacale della moda italiana's bylaw, 11 June 1958, Box 1-6, CNMI.

<sup>82</sup> Valeria Pinchera and Diego Rinaldo, "Fiere e categorie di mercato: Pitti e la moda italiana 1951–1979," in *Istituzioni, mercati imperfetti e problemi di policy/Institutions, Imperfect Markets and Policy*, ed. Luciano Fanti (Pisa, 2021), 248–249.

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*Table 2*  
Activity Network Development During the  
Ready-to-Wear Industry's Co-evolutionary Stage, 1945–1962

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1945, Turin	Ente Italiano Moda (Italian Fashion Authority) was the continuation of the Ente Nazionale Moda that Mussolini founded in 1935 with the aim of institutionalizing behaviors and practices to ensure that the entire fashion value chain was under Italian control. Since 1945, local economic actors such as the Chamber of Commerce of Turin and the Association of Manufacturers strongly supported the Ente, which remained active until the early 1970s.
1949, Rome	Rome's Chamber of Commerce established the Comitato della Moda (Fashion Committee) with the aim to strengthen and increase the productive activities and to maintain constant and active relationships with all national and foreign fashion centers for the technical, artistic, and professional development of the national production.
1949, Milan	Centro Italiano Moda (Italian Fashion Center) was aimed at coordinating all Italian fashion activities. Franco Marinotti, the president of SNIA Viscosa, a giant in the Italian rayon industry, headed the Center, which was therefore linked to the most technologically advanced part of Italy's industry.
1953, Rome	Sindacato Italiano Alta Moda (Italian High Fashion Syndicate, thereafter the Centro Romano Alta Moda Italiana) was founded by prominent Roman couturiers who resumed showing their collections in their own ateliers in Rome before the Florentine presentations. The defection from the Florentine catwalks was endorsed by the local institutions and the part of the press that stressed that Rome had more favorable logistics than Florence.
1954, Florence	The Municipality of Florence, the local Chamber of Commerce, and the Tourist Board provided Giorgini with financial resources to create the Centro di Firenze per la Moda Italiana (Center of Florence for Italian Fashion), which assumed responsibility for organizing the Florentine fashion shows and promoting Italian fashion.
1958, Rome	The founders of Camera Sindacale della Moda Italiana (Chamber Syndical of Italian Fashion) all accepted Giorgini's invitation to the Florence fashion shows in 1951. Giorgini was appointed the association's president.

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Table 2 (Continued)

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1962, Rome	The founders of the Chamber Syndical of Italian Fashion established CNMI. They approved a new bylaw confirming the original aim of coordinating the various initiatives aimed at promoting Italian fashion. The new statute explicitly recognized the need for greater collaboration among political institutions and industrial, artisan, and commercial representatives of private organizations, as well as with professional actors to handle mutual interest problems more effectively. Coordination and collaboration soon became the association's mantra. In essence, coordination was a matter of internal relationships within the association. Collaboration, on the other hand, was a matter of relationships between the association and those public and private actors who, to different degrees and with different aims and roles, were interested in exploiting the favorable outcomes that Giorgini's initiative had achieved. The association never acted as an umbrella organization but as a body whose primary aim was to gain full and exclusive control of Italian fashion shows.
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Sources: Elisabetta Merlo, "Camera nazionale della moda italiana (1958–1989)," in *Lo stile italiano nelle carte. Inventario dell'archivio storico della Camera nazionale della moda italiana (1958–1989)*, ed. Elisabetta Merlo and Maria Natalina Trivisano (Rome, 2018), 1–31; Ivan Paris, *Oggetti cuciti. L'abbigliamento pronto in Italia dal primo dopoguerra agli anni Settanta* (Milan, 2006); Pinchera and Rinallo, "Emergence of Italy as a Fashion Country: Nation Branding and Collective Meaning Creation at Florence's Fashion Shows (1951–1965)," *Business History* 62, no. 1 (2020): 151–178.

shows in Rome.<sup>83</sup> Within a few years, Milan's emergence as an increasingly attractive fashion hub called into question the original scheme, making the process of interaction and negotiation even more tortuous. In 1971, the CNMI established the new fashion category called *alta moda pronta* (ready high fashion), which replaced the existing category called *prêt-à-porter di alta moda* (ready-to-wear high fashion).<sup>84</sup> The decision led to an outraged and worried reaction by the Center of Florence for Italian Fashion, whose president demanded clarity on "what we intend to change by establishing the new sector."<sup>85</sup> Attempts to give the Center of Florence the tools with which to "reabsorb the Milanese secession which can quickly become dangerous and represent a moment of confusion in the panorama of Italian fashion"

<sup>83</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Centro Romano Alta Moda Italiana board of directors, 29 March 1975, box 17-1, CNMI.

<sup>84</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the board of directors, 18 May 1971, box 57-4, CNMI.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from the president of the Centro di Firenze per la moda italiana to the president of CNMI, attached to the minutes of the board of directors, 18 May 1971, box 57-4, CNMI.

were in vain.<sup>86</sup> In 1975, the CNMI helped its members who presented their collections in Milan.<sup>87</sup> This decision unilaterally put an end to the dispute but without providing an institutional solution for the semantic ambiguity underlying the sensemaking process, as a variety of hints from the CNMI's historical archive suggest. In particular, CNMI members were allowed to present ready-to-wear high fashion, knitwear, and boutique collections at the Milan shows, which also applied to the Florentine shows from 1967 onward. In that year, there was uncertainty about what the Florentine show collections should be called. Draft press releases referred to ready-to-wear high fashion as "prêt-à-porter collections created by high fashion houses." However, the press release's final version referred to "prestige high fashion" without any additional specification concerning the producer's category.<sup>88</sup> Promotional brochures provided a further version; namely, ready-to-wear high fashion.<sup>89</sup> This semantic confusion persisted into the 1970s. At the time, the *WWD* published a special issue, "Italian ready-to-wear in its 25th year," while the fashion shows in Milan were experiencing economic crisis and political extremism as a less than promising beginning.<sup>90</sup> In the 1980s, the shows were titled *Milano Collezioni*, a name that was inherently a sign of discontinuity with the past.

The analysis of market, knowledge, and activity network development provides some insights into the Italian ready-to-wear industry identity and field configuration that can be summarized as follows. A commercial intermediary—Giorgini—took the first steps toward industry identity and field configuration development by initiating interactions between fashion creators as well as between them and commercial intermediaries. The Italian ready-to-wear industry's foundational phase was therefore the outcome of private and individual initiatives preceding the associations with representatives from interest groups.<sup>91</sup> Following the success of the Florentine shows, the associations soon increased in

<sup>86</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the technical commission, 16 May 1974, box 16-6, CNMI.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from the president of CNMI to the president of Centro di Firenze per la moda italiana, 18 Sep. 1975, box 16-6, CNMI.

<sup>88</sup> Press release of the Florentine fashion shows, Autumn/Winter 1967/68, box 161-3, CNMI.

<sup>89</sup> Brochure of the Florentine fashion shows, Autumn/Winter 1967/68, box 162-6, CNMI.

<sup>90</sup> See, for instance, the comments by the international press on to the Autumn/Winter 1975/76 fashion shows held in Milan in 1975, box 305-2, CNMI. For the special issue, see "Italian Ready-to-Wear in its 25th Year," *WWD* special issue, 1 Oct. 1976, box 318-2, CNMI.

<sup>91</sup> Paris, "Fashion as a System," 525–527; Elisa V. Massai, "The Tempestuous Decade: Italy 1951–1961," *WWD*, 27 Dec. 1960, 12–13, 18–19; Ivan Paris, "Fashion and Institutions: The AIIA and the Ready-to-Wear Industry in Italy (1945–1975)," *Enterprise & Society* 22, no. 1 (March 2021): 44–77, which focuses on the Italian Clothing Industry Association, set up in 1945, the first association to exclusively protect the interests of the clothing industry and specifically ready-to-wear producers.



number but failed to create dominant organizational structures. Instead, their proliferation led to institutional disjointedness. Consistent with the field's origins and institutional vacuum, patterns of coalition emerged between the creative and industrial sides of the fashion business, which strengthened with international competition pressure. From the 1960s onward, the Italian clothing industry acted increasingly as a trans-organizational structure; that is, as a structure that allows disparate constituents to become aware of their common concerns, to unite, and share information. Knowledge and market developments coalesced to accelerate the process of Italian fashion's identification with aesthetically designed ready-to-wear clothing. Initially, industrial firms' approach to couturiers was merely aimed at making mass-produced clothing commercially appealing to fashion-sensitive female customers. Subsequently, such industrial firms became progressively creativity conscious to the point that emerging fashion designers would design clothes, select fabrics and colors, and even co-supervise the manufacturing processes. At the end of the 1970s, Italian fashion had become a matter of industrial design and was on the verge of embracing an increasingly wide range of products related to clothing. The field configuration process culminated in licensing contracts, which is testimony to the actors' mutual awareness that they were involved in a common enterprise. These licensing contracts regulated the use of brands, which are the trademark of stylists' creativity, thus legitimizing the emerging Italian ready-to-wear industry.<sup>92</sup>

*Growth stage (1980s).* The Italian fashion industry's growth stage occurred when the textile and clothing industries were profoundly reconfigured. Concerning the textile industry, the number of employees was equal to 650,867 in 1951, 493,590 in 1981, and 384,829 in 1991. In the same benchmark years firms were 218,602, 60,061, and 46,161. Employees in the clothing industry were 411,546 in 1951, 676,118 in 1981, and 644,353 in 1991. The number of clothing firms decreased from 218,602 in 1951 to 83,282 in 1981. They were 70,890 in 1991.<sup>93</sup> Despite the similar trend affecting the textile and clothing industry, their reconfiguration was the result of their different reactions to the increasingly fierce international competition. More capital intensive than the clothing industry, the textile industry proved more vulnerable to international competition and experienced great configuration difficulties. More labor intensive but sufficiently flexible to adapt to change, the clothing firms merely downsized and were restructured,

<sup>92</sup>Merlo and Perugini, "Making Italian Fashion Global," 10–17; Samantha Conti, "Italy the Fashion Makers: Fifty Years of Fashion," *WWD*, 1 Feb. 2000, 54–55, 58–59.

<sup>93</sup>Data are taken from the industrial census. Data concerning the clothing industry in 1951 include the footwear industry.

concentrating on high value-added activities such as product development, design, finishing, brand building, and advertising.<sup>94</sup>

Industrial reconfiguration, however, went beyond existing firms' reorganization. Starting with Giorgio Armani (1975), a number of fashion companies had entered the industrial scene at the end of the 1970s. They paved the way for the Italian fashion industry's emergence, marked by a series of close consecutive events. In 1978, Gianni Versace and Gianfranco Ferrè established their firms in Milan, where the first Modit international fair was held that year.<sup>95</sup> In 1979, Armani, who had, in the meantime, signed a licensing contract with GFT, established the Giorgio Armani Men's Wear Corporation U.S.A., and won the Neiman Marcus award.<sup>96</sup> A few years later, he was on the cover of *Time* (1982). This American magazine welcomed the arrival of the Italian fashion industry on the international scene, celebrating Armani's unstructured jacket, which GFT had produced, as a "fashion statement that has truly influenced the world."<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusions

This study analyzed the emergence of the prêt-à-porter and ready-to-wear industries in France and Italy by adopting the theoretical framework that Gustafsson, Jääskeläinen, Maula, and Uotila proposed, and interpreting their long-term trajectories through an institutional theory lens. Previous business history studies on emerging cultural industries did take institutions into account, although to a different extent, and by mainly focusing on a specific country over a limited period. The aim of this study is to improve and broaden this relevant knowledge base by comparing the emergence of industries in different geographical and institutional settings and by taking a long-term perspective. The concluding remarks deconstruct the central role that institutions played in the emergence and configuration of the prêt-à-porter and ready-to-wear industries and, eventually, in paving the way for these industries to converge. This study challenges the traditional approach of business history research on Italian fashion's achievement. It casts new light on Italian fashion's intrinsic weakness since its initial phase by shifting the focus from its impressive performance on the international market to the endogenous dynamics related to the structure, identity, and legitimation of the organizational field.

<sup>94</sup>Ian M. Taplin, "Restructuring and Reconfiguration. The EU Textile and Clothing Industry Adapts to Change," *European Business Review* 18, no. 3 (2006): 172–186.

<sup>95</sup>John Potvin, *Giorgio Armani. The Empire of the Senses* (Aldershot, UK, 2012), 7.

<sup>96</sup>Potvin, *Giorgio Armani*, 191.

<sup>97</sup>Jay Cocks, "Giorgio Armani: Suiting Up for Easy Street," *Time*, 5 Apr. 1982, 60.

Comparing the emergence of the prêt-à-porter and ready-to-wear industries in France and Italy allowed us to pinpoint their development trajectories; highlight their legacies; and improve our understanding of the moderating factors that influenced their emergence, especially as cultural industries on which technological innovations only have a limited impact.

As we have seen, synergic changes in the design and manufacturing processes, as well as in the business and service practices, were decisive in challenging the existing order and eventually providing products with additional value. Our analysis proved that historical legacy is crucial to explaining a cultural industry's emergence, and especially to identify the differences between cultural industries developing within similar social and economic contexts. Between the 1930s and the 1980s, the new French prêt-à-porter industry emerged, capitalizing on the intangible assets of the haute couture heritage. Between the 1950s and the 1980s, Italian ready-to-wear was configured as a fashion category product endowed with democratic values that made it an alternative to haute couture but without a specific and recognized definition.

As the comparison between the prêt-à-porter and the ready-to-wear industries suggests, historical legacy concerns not only products' cultural attributes but also their collective institutional achievements.

The comparison between prêt-à-porter and ready-to-wear industries also shows that institutions were crucial to configuring the industries that were emerging out of disruption to the existing order. Institutions' primary role is not specific to cultural industries. However, in cultural industries such as the fashion industry, stylistic innovations represent most of the innovative activities. It is therefore vital to have institutions that promptly endorse the changes crucial for their survival, such as creating new products and reinventing existing ones. Just as the Chamber played a crucial role in defining and harnessing the haute couture legacy as the backbone of the French fashion industry, the Comité Colbert acted as a catalyst for the capitalization of its heritage and distinction. The still existing CNMI played no such role; it was tardy and conservative in responding to the historical problems that the post-WWII international scenario posed, and was anachronistically concerned with institutionalizing Italian haute couture at a time when ready-to-wear fashion was gaining momentum as an autonomous and innovative clothing manufacturing and designing business. CNMI failed to characterize, qualify, and categorize the new ready-to-wear product and therefore to strongly support the emerging Italian fashion industry.

In the French case, institutions were instrumental in turning historical legacy into heritage, in exploiting heritage as an intangible and marketable asset, and in enhancing the industry's identity over time by

preserving Paris' central role as the original fashion capital and institutional seat. In the Italian institutional vacuum, intermediaries such as Giorgini and other early entrepreneurs played a crucial role as industry founders. However, lacking institutional endorsement, they soon experienced difficulties with identifying and sharing the field's values and beliefs.

Consequently, the Italian ready-to-wear industry was configured as an individually constructed entity rather than a socially constructed one, that, from its initial stage onward, relied primarily on entrepreneurial rather than institutional capabilities. The industry's knowledge and identity depended on individual sensemaking attempts and did not emerge from a shared process of interaction and negotiation. Awareness and understanding of the intangible assets of the history's legacy developed mainly, if not exclusively, at the fashion-company level. The CNMI recognized Milan as a fashion hub and institutional seat *ex post* when fashion's headquarter was moved from Rome to Milan in 1989 at the end of the growth stage. Nevertheless, the CNMI failed to help the industry identity develop during the strategic co-evolutionary stage. The Chamber's and Comité Colbert's monolithic institutional leadership gave Paris an undisputed role as the French capital of fashion. In Italy, institutional confusion and the shifting of fashion capitals negatively affected each other.

The comparison between the prêt-à-porter and the ready-to-wear industries shows that institutional endorsement of the fashion industry's identity and legitimacy, as well as of its product's definition and qualification, was crucial for its configuration and even more significant for its long-term continuation. Indeed, the lack of institutional endorsement might explain the multitude of well-known Italian fashion brands that currently add luster to the portfolios of French luxury conglomerates.

Incidentally, the Italian- and French-owned brands call into question scholars' prevailing interpretation of the fashion industry's development trajectories. According to Djelic and Ainamo, the Italian, French, and American fashion industries evolved by following trajectories determined by powerful legacies that limited their potential for convergence.<sup>98</sup> While our research confirms that the context in which industries are rooted is key for improving our understanding of country-specific organizational models, it nevertheless provides new insights into the conventional wisdom that industries' legacies prevent development trajectories from converging. French luxury conglomerates'

<sup>98</sup> Djelic and Ainamo, "Co-Evolution of New Organizational Forms."

control of Italian fashion brands and manufacturing companies is therefore evidence of their increasing interdependence, whose long-term effects require more in-depth investigation.

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*ELISABETTA MERLO, Associate Professor of Economic History, Bocconi University, Milan, Italy. Corresponding author. Email: [elisabetta.merlo@unibocconi.it](mailto:elisabetta.merlo@unibocconi.it)*

*Professor Merlo's research interests focus on the business history of fashion and the history of textile, clothing, and fashion industries. She has extensively written on the histories of the Italian fashion industry and Italian fashion companies.*

*VALERIA PINCHERA, Professor of Economic History, University of Pisa, Pisa, Italy*

*Professor Pinchera's research fields are the creative and cultural industries, the economy of art, and the business history of fashion. She publishes extensively on the Italian fashion industry and Italian fashion fairs.*