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Fashion and Tourism in Campania in the Middle of the Twentieth Century: a Story with Many Protagonists

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ABSTRACT

In the last decades a large number of Italian tourist destinations have become increasingly popular thanks to the growth of purchase as a consolidated habit of collective tourism, and to the identification of many sites as upscale shopping centers. For such resorts, this trend has turned into a tool for promotion comparable to art, landscape and food. This phenomenon developed in particular in Capri, Ischia and Positano, where between the Fifties and Sixties, thanks to the initiative of local artisans or shrewd foreigner visitors, tailor's shops, boutiques and workshops were created in response to the customers' requests for clothes and accessories tuned to the native 'style'. The authenticity of this process was originally guaranteed by the strong consolidated artisan tradition of the sites and found a favorable conjuncture in the fact that in the middle of the century fashion was combined with tourism and cinema to help Italy out of the post-war crisis. Thanks to its folklore and natural landscape heritage connected to the beauty of its coast, Naples acted as a main trigger for this project: it boasted suitable productive, cultural and economic conditions to aspire to become the "capital of fashion in southern Italy" and Capri, Ischia and Positano were the ideal stages through which the new facet of Italian creativity could be conveyed.

Keywords: Tourism; Capri; Positano; Naples; Fifties

L'introduzione del tema dell'acquisto nella prassi ordinaria del turismo collettivo e l'identificazione di molti luoghi come centri dello shopping d'autore ha favorito negli ultimi decenni diverse mete italiane per le quali tale aspetto si è configurato come un veicolo di promozione analogo all'arte, al paesaggio e al cibo. Questo fenomeno si è

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sviluppato in particolare a Capri, Ischia, Positano, dove tra gli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta, grazie all'intraprendenza di artigiani autoctoni o di astuti frequentatori stranieri, sono nate sartorie, boutique e botteghe in risposta alle richieste di capi e accessori intonati allo 'stile' dei luoghi da parte degli avventori. L'autenticità di questo processo è stata garantita all'origine dal suo radicamento nella consolidata matrice artigiana dei siti ed ha trovato una congiuntura risolutiva nel fatto che alla metà del secolo la moda si è unita al turismo e al cinema per portare l'Italia fuori dalla crisi postbellica. Napoli, grazie al folclore e al ricco patrimonio paesaggistico dei suoi litorali, è stata uno dei principali motori di questo progetto: vantava condizioni produttive, culturali ed economiche per ambire a diventare la "capitale della moda dell'Italia meridionale" e aveva a Capri, Ischia e Positano i palcoscenici ideali in cui veicolare il nuovo volto della creatività italiana.

Keywords: Turismo; Capri; Positano; Napoli; Anni Cinquanta

Introduction

In Italy, in the mid-Twentieth century fashion begins a new path to growth and strengthens its development especially in those areas characterized by a pre-existent and deep-rooted productive tradition, taking on a variety of forms in each geographical quadrant. Each specific situation contributes to the success of this adventure where their features become a reflection of the cultural and manufacturing vocations of the places providing, thanks to their creatives, a significant contribution to the shaping of the kaleidoscopic face of Italian fashion.

While in Turin they focus on the relationship with industry, in Florence on the artistic qualities of the context and in Rome everything revolves around a possible synergy with the cinema industry, Naples, which has a traditional or even ancient widespread network for the production of clothing and accessories, possesses all the characteristics to qualify as the "fashion capital of southern Italy" (Robiola, 1954, p. 72).

In the post-war period, in the city and in its province there exists a widespread craftsmanship and a qualified tailoring workforce, not strong enough though to emancipate itself and find its own commercial independence. Indeed, there is no organized professional manufacturing system, but here as elsewhere they seek, supported by a distinctive taste and skills, to carve out a place for themselves in the national scenario. A favorable opportunity arises in the early Fifties, when fashion, together with tourism, is recognized as a driving factor capable of bringing Italy out of the tensions left by the war. The capital city of Campania with its 'mythical' surroundings, thanks to the folklore and the rich landscape heritage of the islands and of the smaller towns, plays a decisive role as one of the driving forces of this project.

This is a time when Italian fashion has a weak self-awareness and a rudimentary communicative network that allows limited visibility; it lacks a definite connotation

that, however, will later be acquired thanks to a clever approach which links it to the country's landscape and artistic heritage. The identity of the 'country of fashion' is built through a diversity of values that makes it possible, in fact, for the local products, so notable for their high quality and good taste, to go beyond the borders of local reputation and achieve the supranational success they deserve.

Fashion marries art, nature and tourism, and relies on them to convey and highlight, through a renewed communication mode, photography, its characteristics of beauty and uniqueness. Now the fashion photographers, combining the artistic trends from beyond the Alps with the suggestions coming from the world of movies, succeed in establishing a new narrative style. Here the realism of the beautiful landscape intertwines with the luxury of exclusive modeling, while the charm of uncontaminated locations is combined with chic proposals of fine garments or for holiday attire.

From this point of view the supranational success of the Campania archipelago begins at the end of the Forties, when a kind of select tourism arrives here, in many cases consisting of English and Americans who had stayed in the *rest camps* established in 1943. Tourists become temporary citizens of these localities increasing, as a consequence, the demand for services. New hotels are built, the few existing guest houses are extended, the first spectacular events are created, and they all form a solid basis for the development of the tourism industry. The tailors and cobblers, driven by the demand coming from foreigners, who require souvenirs and clothing suitable for their holiday and, at the same time, urged by the enterprising action of influential creatives who move to these areas, take action individually, opening boutiques or laboratories intended to carry out sewing alterations or sell 'rags', costumes, sandals, thus starting a real cultural phenomenon particularly beneficial for the local economy. Here, in fact, unlike the big cities, where *couturiers* and institutions are mainly concentrated on high and boutique fashion, they are encouraged to produce items destined to resort fashion, characterized by a peculiar echo and reference to local 'culture' and to the historical identity of the places. They certainly benefit from their international fame, before becoming prey to a commercial and unflattering destiny.

1. Capri and Ischia

Among the different beauties in the gulf, Capri has something special, because here the natural environment, culture and ritual mix together to create a myth. Its uniqueness is one of the tools that facilitates the spread of Italian clothing in the world. A cosmopolitan and scenic place, whose name had been among the worldly international destinations since the 1920s, the island becomes the ideal stage from where to convey the new aspect of Italian creativity. This is, in fact, not just any beach, it is, instead, the first place of the Belpaese where the civilization of the image can triumph, where the creative inspiration of emerging figures of the national context can find the most striking worldly outburst, even before reaching the official headquarters of the international limelight.

But it is not just the charm of the site and its extravagance that impose the name of the island of mermaids on the world scene; a notable contribution is provided by the resourcefulness of those who work there, the manual skills and the creativity that had long been developing among the artisans. Here, in fact, since the Fascist season a collective high quality expertise in the production of fabrics and accessories had strengthened. In particular, the technical and creative experimentation directed to everyday objects, but above all to non-traditional materials, has given life to a cultural wealth of practices and customs from which it is possible to give birth to a new and distinctive preciousness, which finds its best expression in clothes and high-quality furnishing accessories.

Edwin Cerio, an illuminated mayor, and a staunch defender of the natural beauty, history and cultural heritage of his native island, set up a "domestic industry" in 1929 dedicated to the spread of hand spinning and weaving, on the basis of a liberal principle of training and autonomous exercise of an art "creating joy" (Cerio, 1930, pp. 6-8). A collective workshop where women hand-wove plots to create cushions, tablecloths, towels, shawls, beach suits and dresses, giving free rein to their creative imagination (**Figure 1**). Then, in 1935, with the support of the autarchic government, which also supported the activity of the rope shoe factory (as an alternative to leather) by Federico Strina, "the only one in Italy" capable of producing about fifty thousand pairs of footwear a year with the joint work of about fifty workers working at the plant or at home, they start using broom and agave, on the basis of a system designed by Cavalier Mazzarella, for the production of "typical fabrics" intended for the production of clothes and items for home furnishings. A "domestic" industry that satisfied the numerous tourists who even then "wished to bring such typical products, mostly fabrics, back to their countries".



Figure 1: Weaving and finishing of linen in the Capri laboratory "La Tessitrice dell'isola"
Source: Cerio, 1930, p. 13

In 1946, that laboratory was taken over by Baroness Gallotti who intentionally continued to call it "La Tessitrice dell'isola" providing a real and invaluable continuity to the 'knowledge' possessed by the women living on the island (Verbena, 2005, p. 72).

Thus, at the end of the Forties, in the general climate of recovery of the Italian economy, the Caprese factory developed into the more aristocratic artisan atelier of Maria Chiara Gallotti, where the refined skills of the weavers is intertwined with the Mediterranean creativity of the Roman noblewoman whose aim is to drive the manufacturing tradition towards a modern creative direction. Its success, which declines in the Sixties due to unfortunate family events, is therefore based on solid material foundations, and will later take a more international dimension thanks to a wise balance between worldliness, local traditions and communication (**Figures 2-3**).

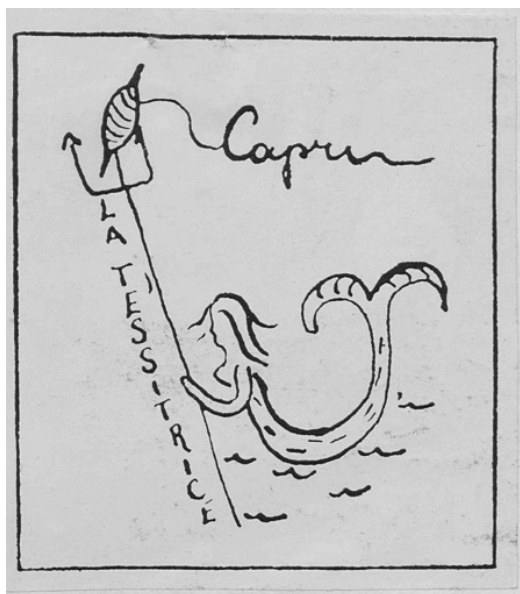


Figure 2: The trademark *La Tessitrice dell'isola* registered by Gallotti in 1949

Source: State General Archive

Figure 3: Countess Maria Chiara Gallotti wearing one of her creations (1951/52)

Source: Esposito, 2015, p. 41

The peculiarity of her work, considered exemplary in the entire Italian textile manufacturing panorama, lies in the combination of raffia and natural fibers with other artificial ones, with which she continues to produce fabrics for furniture and garments (Rogers, 1950, p. 45). By integrating the weaving techniques that she learned in Ethiopia and the local customs, with the chromatic suggestions "distilled from the very nature of Capri" (Robiola, 1953, p. 13), Gallotti gives life to an unusual form of craftsmanship with which she gains sudden international prestige, until she is recognized by the critics as one of the ambassadors of Italian fashion in the Fifties.

Her 'art applied to fashion' makes the name of Capri famous in Rome, Florence, in America and also in Japan, and conveys an "unmistakable locally created dressing style" (Robiola, 1953, p. 13), acting everywhere as a testimony of Italian taste and as an effective, indirect tool of tourist propaganda (**Figures 4-5**).



Figures 4-5: Clothes by Maria Clara Gallotti, *La Tessitrice dell'isola*

Source: Archive Garolla

Among those who exploited the media potential of the 'happy island' is also the Marquis Emilio Pucci. He repeatedly visits the island which leads him to a deep knowledge of the craftsmanship existing there – including La Tessitrice herself with whom he collaborates for the creation of the so-called "1947 Black", a collection where the black of the clothes is not a sign of mourning but of the obstinate search for elegance in fashion in the difficult post-war context (Brin, 1958, p. 64). Then, in 1950 he launches a series of actions aimed at making Capri "the center of European fashion". A project that, taking advantage of the dark period of Paris fashion and of parallel initiatives aimed at giving visibility to Italian production, reaches concrete results thanks to the liveliness of all the actors involved around the man from Tuscany. The tailor-marquis, who opens his boutique near the new La "Canzone del Mare" establishment, wanted by the American Grace Fields to host social events, has understood how to make people talk about himself and Capri: he designs trousers and shirts in bright colors, headscarves with the typical motifs of the island, he launches the 'tagliatelle' hats, organizes parades. He focuses both on a captivating narrative form and on clothing specifically aimed at leisure time - suitable to embody the spontaneity of the new behavioral model -, and on the exclusivity of the site to which he decides to link his name strategically. From that moment on, Emilio di Capri influences not only the fame of the island in the world, but also the visual languages that spread its success, for example in fashion photography through which he shows the beauty of the place and his creations using new modes. Regina Relang for Pucci creates special scenic fictions set in Capri's most iconic landmarks, where the models interpret the role of happy tourists on holiday (Vaccari, 2005, pp. 383-384) (**Figures 6-7**).

Besides Pucci and Gallotti, another personality who realises Capri's potential as an experimentation site and the opportunity to exploit its fame is Sonja de Lennart, who, seizing the new sporty orientation of women's clothing, realizes in 1948 the first

famous model of Capri Pants, successfully popularized through their use by movie stars (Esposito, 2015, pp. 147-152).



Figure 6: Creation by Emilio di Capri, 1949

Source: Esposito, 2015, p. 69



Figure 7: Dress and Accessories by Emilio Pucci, 1952

Source: Esposito, 2015, p. 72

The three creatives show different versions of a caprese style that then, in fact, they themselves help to define. While de Lennart creates the widespread stereotype existing in the Nordic culture of an island that evokes beauty, freedom and joy of life, The Tessitrice spreads the idea of the elaborate 'handmade' product that have been made there from time immemorial and the marquis, with his daring creations, strengthens the view of the island as an oasis where all sorts of eccentricities are allowed. Their products, distinguished by excellent craftsmanship, sober but elegant modeling, feed on their origin and the history of the place, becoming representative of a culture and a model of life. The intangible qualities of which they are imbued are superimposed on the traditional values of the context, ensuring continuity with the past while adding a touch of refined modernity. With them, Capri begins to take on the appearance of a unique fashion catwalk, where worldliness and know-how create an unusual successful partnership. The island is filled with boutiques, some managed by foreign owners, many others by local staff – such as the historic La Parisienne, Alberto, Nello Spinella and Celeste Cosentino, who reinterpret the basic garments of summer clothing, adjusting them, through the choice of color and the details of the finishes, to the local style (Spinelli, 2010, pp. 36-40; Foschini, 1954, pp. 51-55) – because fashion seems to be a fertile ground for everyone to root their business.

Meanwhile, also the thermal waters continue to promote tourism and in Ischia, another tourist destination for a well-off clientele, flourishes the activity of various hand-crafted ateliers, among which – in addition to those of the tailor Filippo, of Carmela Mascolo and of Madama Antonia (Tagliatela, 2010, pp. 47-51) – emerges that of Elena Wasserman. She was a German tourist who, attracted by the beauty of the place, settles there permanently, starting, since 1952, a business for the production

of seaside clothing, which becomes a specific pole of interest for the international jet-set. To give prestige to Mrs. Wassermann, as happens for Pucci, are the photographic campaigns by Relang that spread their creations worldwide, making them become an essential part of the creative identity of the gulf. Also for her the German artist chooses characteristic glimpses and models in spontaneous attitudes which create an immediate emotional impact (**Figures 8-9**).



Figures 8-9: Creations by “La Boutique” by Elena Wassermann in two photos by Regina Relang

Source: Tagliatela, 2010, pp. 48-49

With initiatives aimed at giving an international dimension to the fashion of the islands, the Campania archipelago, therefore, consolidates the vitality of the numerous native artisans, but also makes it a popular destination for many foreigners interested in investing in the sector, a crossroads of manual knowledge and formal experimentation, which gradually consolidates in the following decades as a center of Italian fashion. From 1967, for example, Capri acquires the specific role of the 'island of fashion' and this aspect is further strengthened by MareModa, an event of supranational resonance that for a decade transforms the site into the favorite set of the media, where the hotels, the Charterhouse and the Cerio palace form an attractive background for the launch of the most daring creations of the Italian style and of the artisan production of Campania linked to the sea and vacation. Now for Capri the image as refuge for every extravagance does not fade, but it is strengthened so the island becomes a place where "everything can happen", where social upheavals and changes in customs, motivated by the 1968 revolutionary drive, find the most appropriate location and journalism, which reports the current events, can amplify its scope thanks to the communicative power exercised by the photo shoot realized in a highly prestigious venue. The spectacular nature of the event and the indulgence in excess develop the prerogative of Capri as a 'special venue', certainly suitable to host "the largest market of the sea"

(Berti, 1972, fsn), but also to demonstrate the competitive edge gained by the entire region in this sector.

2. Positano

The "rags" are the basic ingredient of Positano businesses, a typical and profitable resource that, together with its landscape and art, has become, over time, a solid vehicle for tourism promotion. Their fortunate history originates in the wealth of traditional manufacturing activities carried out in this territory for centuries and grows with the fame of the jewel of the Amalfi coast. Like in the rest of Italy, here in the second post-war period there is a state of considerable poverty and the expectations for the future are low, nothing compared to the fortune reached in the following decades. The village is still rather unknown and above all difficult to reach. As Steinbeck writes on the pages of Harper's Bazaar in 1953, "Positano does not have much of any industry (...). On shore there is a little shoemaking, some carpentry and a few arts and crafts. It would be difficult to consider tourists an industry because there are not enough of them. They do, however, provide a bit of luxury for the villagers "(Steinbeck, 1953, pp. 188-189). In the houses and convents there were wives and daughters of fishermen and peasants dedicated to the art of sewing and lace, manufactures that kept alive the historical 'industries' of the village: those of the "cannavaccio", created with the tow yarns of Frattamaggiore , and that of the "filugelli" (another name for the silkworms) from which the silk was obtained (Talamo, 1890, pp. 241-242).

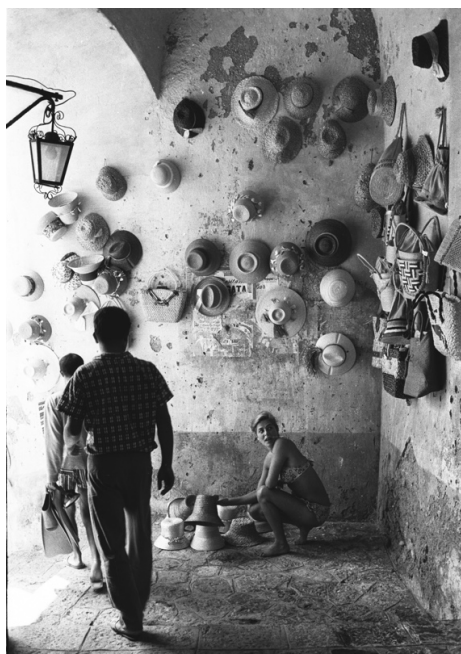


Figure 10: Selling bags and straw hats in the Positano alleys

Source: Archive Garolla

Since the Thirties, this small village, dominated by silence and adorned with houses in different colors, a real hiding place at the end of the world, becomes a cosmopolitan colony of artists who take refuge there, attracted by its mild climate, Mediterranean vegetation and simple life. Some of them devote themselves to textile art: the Jew Martin Wolf, who makes carpets with bright colors obtained from the leaves of the trees of the village Arienzo, and Irene Kowaliska, active, since 1931, in Vietri at the Ceramics Industry of Salerno and, then, from 1942 in Positano. The sensitive Polish woman, "rummaging in the primitive life of the surrounding South" (Cuccu, 1991, p. 8), provides a significant contribution to the creation of the 'Vietri Style', a deliberately simplified language, whose strength consists in the repetition of few, easily recognizable elements. Later, when her research extends to the field of fabrics, the subjects that once decorated the pottery with Nordic accents (donkeys, fish, fruit, starfish, mermaids, peasants) are transferred to canvas, creating, both pieces in "limited editions" (Ponti, 1939, p. 49), and unique garments of clothing (in particular in collaboration with Myrica), as well as long cloths used for clothing and interior design (**Figure 11**). The critics, then particularly intent on exalting these products of craftsmanship, appreciate their peculiar creative connotation, so much as to choose them, together with baroness Gallotti of Capri, to represent *Italy at work* in the textile sector in New York, with the result of spreading overseas the resources in terms of skills and creativity in this sector existing in this area.



Figure 11: Irene Kowaliska in the house-textile art in Positano

Source: Ponti, 1950, p. 58

In Positano – which she leaves in 1956 to move to Rome where she works until 1968 – her suggestive poetic and formal experiments, the iconographic themes, both primitive and modern, create a new design dimension that 'sets the precedence', not through teaching, but by encouraging the locals to work freely and spontaneously, in line with the 'handmade' trends and prospects.

In that season, the fashion press takes an interest in art and the landscape, contributing, with the cinema and the journalism of the sector, to promoting worldwide the peculiarities of the still not well-known sites and fueling the tourist turmoil achieved in the following decades. Irene Kowaliska's fabrics spread the name of Positano in decorative art exhibitions all over the world and in European magazines, while the picturesque "apricot-colored beehive crumbling towards an enameled and

immobile sea" (Brin, 1954, p. 54) offers itself as the ideal setting for showing bathing suits and "swimwear" bearing names unknown to the area (such as Cole, Alma, Armonia and Glans). The work of local creatives is still silent and anonymous, while the singular landscape is the value of strong communicative impact attracting a vital circulation of visitors (**Figures 12-13**).



Figure 12: Dress by Irene Kowaliska on the cover of *Zeit und Bild*, 1954

Source: Alamaro & Donato, 1992, fsn

Figure 13: Photos of swimming costumes against the landscape of Positano

Source: Brin, 1954, pp. 60-61

The tourist phenomenon grows in the mid-Fifties, when the results of the multiple promotional activities established here are first created by Mayor Sersale and then by Professor Umberto Fragola for the Tourist and Tourism Association (between 1953 and 1965). First the setting up of the rest camps, where in 1944 the British army officers are welcomed for a period of rest, and from where they bring back the pleasures offered by the welcoming city to their homeland; then, the historical re-enactment of *The Landing of the Saracens* (1950-56) to which Positano citizens and holidaymakers collaborate with exceptional spontaneity in the creation of costumes and sets, attracting a large audience; and, finally, there is the "Saraceno d'oro", an award conferred to personalities of the entertainment world, an event which attracts too large an audience for the small village.

In an atmosphere increasingly brightened up by the now concrete prospect offered by tourism which offers a redemption from the miseries left by the war, therefore, the face of Positano begins to change: hotels, restaurants, few bathing establishments and some nightclubs are set up; there are also some workshops and labs for clothes and accessories through which it is possible to gradually begin to talk about a "made in Positano" fashion. When the demand for new select tourism made up by English and then German and Italian artists and actors grows, to become a mass phenomenon that involves the entire community, the Positano inhabitants find in the fabrics, or in the leather of sandals, an immediate link with local traditions and in their desire to investigate its many modern possibilities, a resource through which to channel their creativity.



Figures 14-15-16: The 'rags' of the Positano boutiques

Source: Rispoli, 1989

On the basis of the little know-how of tailoring art possessed by some locals and of the many formal encouragements provided by the international artistic circle present on site or by the 'unusual' personalities that come even on occasional visits, a system of domestic workshops spontaneously flourishes, whose creative peculiarity lies in the simplicity of the garments for holiday life, suitably tuned to the search for naturalness and the return to the 'basic' living in the European context in the mid-Sixties, when their business prospers. The result is an unprecedented personalized fast look, which has nothing of the anonymity of the packaged product, economically accessible to a wide range of customers, more useful than any souvenir and also able to evoke the spirit of the place and its roots (**Figures 14-15-16**). Trousers, costumes, hats and sandals, the most modern items in the women's wardrobe of the moment, are their highlights; the 'made to measure' and the use of unusual materials, such as natural leather and straw or colored and simple 'rags', suitable to the exuberant setting, their strengths. One of the first tailoring workshops is that of Maria Lampo (so called for the speed with which her husband can make pants for passers-by), whose main idea consists in adapting the 'fazzolettoni', the large handkerchiefs traditionally worn by the peasants, to make cotton ruffle costumes and unusual beachwear. Another important workshop is that by Salvatore Esposito dedicated, since 1952, to the production of men's and women's trousers, in which the tailor also experiments with the unusual processing of linen cloths from disused military sheets and, then, the two-colored trousers, with legs in different colors, as in the film by Adriano Celentano. These pioneers train Raffele Castellano and the 'cutters' of some boutiques later built in the alleys of Positano, in particular, Rino Casola and Brunella, who re-interprets the gauze generally used to cover the chairs and bleach velvet, ie treated with fading procedures.

Over time, with the increasing popularity of the place, the number of buyers also increases and, consequently, the number of producers whose notoriety reaches unexpected peaks in the Seventies (also thanks to the promotion supported at the regional level by MareModa Capri). In these years the twelve boutiques multiply

rapidly while, consequently, the production becomes more standardized and increases exponentially which leads to an industrial production in series and, therefore, to a loss of its original value.

In the crisis of the Nineties, when the global economic and social scenarios greatly undermine its strength and values, only the four boutiques from which this phenomenon started (Pepito, Brunella, Maria Lampo and Rino), manage to survive thanks to their long standing tradition and valuable know-how, but also to the economic power that those 'gold rags' had allowed them to accumulate.

3. Naples

In Naples after World War II the economic recovery starts from the reconstruction of the port, the airport and the hotels, because through these great outlets open to the world the city can export all "those products that have long enjoyed so much fame", useful to the tourism industry (Dunn, 1947, p. 4). The programmatic momentum also involves the potential of the territory, the artistic and natural beauties and "the genius of the people", merged into that vast wealth of resources that are lace, fabrics, gloves, inlays, leather goods, ceramics and jewels. The time has come to set up the segmented and spontaneous network of existing laboratories, to raise awareness of their economic capabilities to all the factories that since the Thirties have contributed, together with others, to the progressive emancipation of the Italian fashion industry from foreign influence. (**Figure 17**).



Figure 17: Making gloves in Naples's alleys

Source: Archive Garolla

Because even then, as documented by the events promoted by the National Fashion Agency, in Turin and also in Naples, the city boasts "an ancient and solid tradition

supported by great tailors" (Pallavicini, 1949, p. 34), among which excelled, for women's tailoring, the "houses" Riccardi, Boccafusca, Cassisi, Canessa, Di Fenizio; for the male one Blasi, Attolini, Caggiula, De Curtis, Visone; and a noteworthy supply chain in the field of accessories, with the shoes of Vincenzo Valentino, the gloves of Portolano, the jewelery of Morabito, Jacoangeli and Decaro and the bags of Tramontano. The ateliers are numerous and all of high value, but they are neither sufficiently visible nor defended by appropriate associative circuits; their only weaknesses are, in fact, the lack of an adequate communication structure and limited commercial openness (Foschini, 1954², p. 47). Their consistency, the multiplicity of the fields of interest, the quality of the creations and, nevertheless, the importance of national tourism (Foschini 1954², p. 49), still deserve to conquer a collective and symbolic force to become a significant reference point in the wider international panorama.

Therefore, in order to bring the south of Italy in line with the well-known capitals of fashion, Naples must put into practice what it takes to implement the initial intentions. Hence the birth of the Ente Sviluppo Turismo, a Board for the Development of Tourism, dedicated to the enhancement of the Neapolitan and peripheral hotel industry; the reopening of the Mostra d'Oltremare and of the Italian Work in the World (1952), a huge exhibition space for the promotion of trade, leisure and entertainment, where, in 1953, the Mediterranean Center for the Fashion and Crafts is created; and, moreover, the Mediterranean Circle of Tailors, activated by Maestro Angelo Blasi in 1954 to protect the ancient manual work of men's tailoring skills, fearfully threatened by the slow imposition of ready-made fashion. Generally intent on enhancing the southern laboratories, "which for taste and finishing technique are not inferior to those of other regions of Italy", the Mediterranean Center of fashion, with the leadership of the President of the Mostra d'Oltremare, engineer Luigi Tocchetti, and the journalist Anna Dinella, acts together with the Italian Fashion Agency and supports its activities on the basis of voluntary contributions from the Ministries, the Industrial Union, the Chamber of Commerce, the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, the banking institutes, local authorities, fashion houses and clothing artisans.

The bodies engaged are all directly involved in the tourism and trade sectors, but their interests mainly converge on crafts, a field useful for fashion which can rely on the inventiveness of the operators. For this reason, the objectives set out in Article 2 of the Bylaws include:

"(...) renewing and enhancing Southern and insular handicraft related to clothing (...); to promote the development of cultural, economic and social relations between the organizations that are interested in the Fashion of Mediterranean Countries with ongoing forms of collaboration; to hold an annual conference in which the directives of this collaboration are fixed; (...) organizing exhibitions aimed at highlighting the social, cultural and economic value of Craftsmanship and Fashion, as well as their importance as factors in the life of the Nation; (...) encourage the exchange of products and take all initiatives to encourage the development of the artisan activity also through collective or individual participation in exhibitions and fairs, in Italy and abroad".

In order to give effective force to the planned programmatic intentions, since July 1953, the Center organizes theme congresses and events (including excursions to Capri,

Sorrento and Pompeii), with a positive impact on publicity and sector specific dissemination events: in addition to the Festival of Italian Fashion and textile industry – which takes place in September 1954, despite the ferments and difficulties, in the presence of 10,000 people –, there are the National Competition for Pattern Drafters (1956), some events in Calabria and Sicily to promote the application of craftsmanship skills typical of Sardinia, Calabria, Puglia or Abruzzo to fashion, and other initiatives overseas, such as the cruise of Italian fashion in Venezuela and Colombia (1956). Of particular importance, in September 1954, a few years after the similar Florentine successes, is the International Congress of Fashion, Clothing and Textiles, which sees the participation of representatives of the city government, ministerial and regional delegates of the competent bodies and houses of Italian and Southern fashion. The aim is to provide evidence of their skill to the international and local press, in order that the whole of Italy and the "Mediterranean countries that so far, unlike the Americans and the northern Europeans, have kept away from the Italian fashion shows" can realize that "Naples has its breeding ground of 'young designers' too" (Atmosfera 'giovani firme' a Napoli, 1955, p. 66). The idea is, in fact, to consolidate the position achieved by Italian fashion in the international scenario and to extend its fortune towards the Mediterranean basin, for which the Neapolitan pole intends to constitute a specific channel. The primary objective is to raise the tone and quality of the products, stimulate and expand demand, while at the same time starting synergic collaborations with the textile industries. The invitation to renewal, useful to continually arouse the curiosity of the female public, is launched also in order to "enhance the talent of young pattern drafters " and let the same makers of clothing emerge, thus rediscovering in the "vast territory" full of surprising rarities of popular art "themes of strong identity and great success (Foschini, 1950, p. 66). For the province of Naples the real interests of the world market push to focus their attention especially on accessories: "gloves, then high quality shoes (...). Then the leather goods of all kinds. Corals, cameos and turtles. The laces of Sorrento (...). Weaving like that of Capri that has already achieved international success. Straw products, watermarks and many other specialties "(Picone, 1955, p. 69).



Figures 18-19-20: Creations by: La Tessitrice dell'isola, Sarli and Emilio at the *Festival of Italian Fashion and Textiles*, Naples, September 1954

At the closing of the heated debate, on the stages of the Teatro Mediterraneo and the Arena Flegrea, there are presentations of models, accessories and fabrics created by

Neapolitan houses (Beatrice di Capri, Faraoni, Maria Consiglio Fashion, Tosco, Delgado, Fasano, Galateri, Sarli, Traboni, La Tessitrice of the island, Irene Kowaliska) and Italian (Bellenghi, Capucci, Emilio, Ferdinandi, Fontana, Garnett, Giovannelli-Sciarra, Marucelli, Mingolini-Guggenheim, Schuberth, ESVAM), together with a large representation of local craftsmanship, strongly wishing to gain fame (Centro Mediterraneo della Moda e dell'Artigianato, 1955, pp. 87-90) (**Figures 18-19-20**).

Besides La Tessitrice dell'Isola, who, together with the Beatrice boutique in Capri, receives the Cup of the Provincial Federation of Crafts in Naples, and ESVAM, to which the Oltremare Cup is awarded for "the delicacy with which it has managed to make the classic, primitive and therefore beautiful island creations enter the world of fashion" (Napoli all'avanguardia della moda femminile, 1954, p. 5), the main revelation of the event is Fausto Sarli, a student of the Neapolitan Emilio Schuberth. The prize for best pattern drafter, formalized with the award of the Golden Zagara, make him emerge in the national context, so much so that after only two years his creations are shown in Palazzo Pitti with the well known Casanova collection (Giordani Aragno, 2007, p. 36).

Therefore, between 1953 and 1954, for the first time in Naples, the political class establishes an official synergy with the protagonists of fashion, showing particular sensitivity to the development of talents who have just started their creative career, and who, according to the acute and well informed journalist Elsa Robiola, compared to colleagues active in northern Italy have the undoubted merit of "cultivating the tradition of local workforce with greater wealth of ideas: the bustling life of the city, the huge influx of foreigners, the very bright summer in the Islands and on the Amalfi coast, further refine the taste and the intelligence of their creations "(Atmosfera 'giovani firme' a Napoli, 1955, p. 67).



Figure 21: Coral Sandal by Mario Valentino, Photo by Francesco Tanasi
Source: Archive Mario Valentino

Among the significant consequences of the actions undertaken by the Mediterranean Center is also the indirect merit of having directed Mario Valentino towards a thriving creative activity. The warning to give "a particular emphasis to coral as finishing and detail of women's clothing" (D'Aquino, 1953, p. 7), thus enhancing one of the manufacturing excellence of the Neapolitan province, is acutely caught by the debutant 'Neapolitan shoe maker', who, after the apprenticeship made in his father's workshop,

starts an independent path in the production of footwear. Taking advantage of the skills of the Torresi masters, in 1954 he manages to create a sandal totally composed of coral beads, with which he gains ample credit. The shoe-jewel – made with a 'coral worker' from Torre del Greco – marks the official beginning of his successful career in high fashion and, consequently, the permanence of Naples in the vast international footwear circuit. (Figure 21).

By 1954 the post-war crisis atmosphere is a thing of the past; the economic growth is more solid, women are becoming more consciously aware of the pleasure of dressing, the magazines recognize that the capital has become a "new platform for fashion" (Robiola, 1954³, p. 71): in hotels, cinemas, in the art galleries, parades and events are held to show both foreigners and Italians the quality of the great Neapolitan workshop, while in the street the attention of the public is captured by the windows of the first mono-brand boutiques, like that of Salvatore Ferragamo (1954).



Figure 22: Creations by the Di Fenizio House opposite the restaurant *Zi Teresa* in Santa Lucia

Source: Pallavicini, 1949, p. 36

The perception that there is an efficient and solid activity in the sector is conveyed first and foremost through the communication of a well-known image at a national level and that is why in the well designed campaign undertaken by the sector press, also articles dealing with this still unknown aspect of Naples start to be published. The images that the magazines capture and divulge to the country are now the vehicle of new kinds of tourism and they propose unfamiliar or profoundly peculiar aspects of each place which help to create the image of an ideal leisure destination that the bodies in charge are trying to build. In the varied panorama of the itineraries in the "Italy further down" (Linati, 1949, p. 33), Naples is considered as a "dying city that is always reborn, both tragic and comic, incomparably beautiful and horrid" (Pallavicini,

1949, p. 32); a "singing" or "overcrowded" city (Robiola, 1956, pp. 36-51), whose manufactures have a singular taste "of sea, rocks of mermaid charms" (Robiola, 1954², p. 22).

Bellezza – official mouthpiece for Italian fashion – exhibits the creations of Sarli, Cassisi, Di Fenizio in the "colorful and funny", "deliciously spontaneous" setting of the Piedigrotta festival (Robiola, 1954, pp. 46-51), among the lights, the allegorical chariots and the popular ferment of the *scugnizzi*, or in the equally authentic context of the restaurants along the seafront and on the shore of the gulf. This is to bring out the strength of the luminosity of the "eternal spring sun of Naples" (Pallavicini, 1949, p. 36) which allows Neapolitan tailors to have in their garments and their colors an absolutely peculiar swiftness (**Figures 22 and 23**). Indeed, in the multifaceted Italian geography, each place confers a special distinctive trait to their products, where also fashion comes to reflect immaterial values and 'competencies' of various kinds, with the advantage of obtaining a national picture which constitutes a many-sided, yet authentic and inimitable, heritage.



Figure 23: Creations by Sarli in the context of the Piedigrotta celebrations

Source: Robiola, 1954, pp. 46-47

Meanwhile the national balance of the sector stresses the role of the capital where the film circuit and the nascent activity of the Chamber of Commerce seem to guarantee stability and affirmation also to those Neapolitans who move there (Paris, 2006, pp. 231-241); for similar reasons, some shadows also fall on the Mediterranean Center, which was reborn in 1960 within the Fair of the House, Construction, Furniture, Clothing of the Mostra d'Oltremare, with a deliberately more commercial connotation (Dinella, 1961, f.s.n.).

While Sarli, since 1959, works mainly in Rome, Mario Valentino and Livio De Simone remain faithful to their land of origin, able in various ways to ensure their production a supranational scope with a marked Neapolitan imprint. After the debut with the coral sandal and a period of valid collaboration with the US company I. Miller Shoe, Mario Valentino, in fact, invests in the hometown the profits earned from the first successes, setting up his company in the heart of the Sanità district, with the advantage of ensuring an important continuity to the material culture that has developed for centuries in the leather processing sector. A choice motivated by an unconditional loyalty to his Naples and the persistent intention to create wealth through an intelligent exploitation of the resources already present in the area. Mario, in fact, will also distinguish himself as a keen cultural promoter, a man capable of initiating processes in the fields of art and industry, thanks to fruitful collaborations with the Neapolitan and international cultural élites. Starting from pure craftsmanship with his own brand, his shoe factory becomes a real business for the production of a wide range of leather accessories and clothes, aimed at the world market. Several factors have contributed to the achievement of this result: the openness to modern forms of collaboration with high-profile designers (Rabanne, Lagerfeld, Gateau, Acquaviva, Armani, Versace, Montana), the collaboration with the best illustrators and photographers responsible for the company's advertising image (from Brunetta to Lopez, from Mapplethorpe to Rubartelli, Avedon, Helmut Newton and others) and, lastly, the ability to combine the ideas captured in the US scenario with the most authentic Italian roots. In fact, each place gives an unmistakable direction to its production, also decanting immaterial values and 'knowledge' of various kinds, with the advantage of composing, in the totality of the national framework, a multifaceted, authentic and inimitable.

Livio De Simone, on the other hand, is oriented towards the textile sector starting from singular artistic interests, with the advantage of finding a successful field of application in garments for holiday life. In the middle of the century, women's fashion undertakes the path of renewal and can also give space to advanced positions such as those the artist-tailor exhibits interpreting the design of the dress according to the principles of the work of art. The cultural climate born around the Movement of Concrete Art arouses in him a deep involvement, leading him to express his figurative research, of calculated inaccuracy, on 'canvases' experimentally worn by women of the Neapolitan aristocracy or the entertainment world. In a process halfway between art and fashion, he prefers decorative motifs drawn from Mediterranean figurative culture, imprecise traits, irregular backgrounds and mixed silhouettes of quotations and quirks, in a chromatic scale that deliberately includes "all possible colors" (Liberti, 2005, pp. 69-79). After drawing fabrics for Emilio Pucci, Luisa Spagnoli and many others, in 1957 he shows his simple garments (chemisier, sarongs, tunics) on the catwalks of Florence. From then on, his hand made proposals for the beach total look – appropriately distributed in the tourist areas of Campania – are increasingly enriched, to include furniture products in which the pictorial language used on clothes is applied consistently (**Figure 24**).



Figure 24: Livio De Simone at work

Source: Archive Garolla

The initial artisan vocation of the protagonists selected so far as an example of creators of women's fashion follows a process of cultured experimentation and each of them will achieve unparalleled formal and informal levels that will allow them to join the select group of makers of the most authentic expressive languages of creative Italy. From skilled specialists they have become renowned entrepreneurs, sensitive actors of a Made in Naples product that has established a productive network, beneficial for local economies and certainly exemplary on the cultural level.

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