

Entrepreneurial Ecosystems in the Textile and Apparel Industry

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Before the 1980s, research involving entrepreneurship focused on a person's personality, risk aversion level, and other internal qualities that affected business ownership success. However, researchers began to examine the influence of externalities such as regional, social, cultural, political, and economic structures on the entrepreneurship process (Spilling, 1996; Spigel & Harrison, 2018; Van de Ven, 1993). Entrepreneurs are now seen as intimately tied through their social relationships to a broader network of actors (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003) in their entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE). These systems have become a subject of inquiry by scholars who have sought to explain why and how particular geographic regions experience more significant start-up growth than others (Lyon-Hill et al., 2017). Mapping an entrepreneurial ecosystem involves identifying and visualizing relationships between actors in a network. Ecosystem mapping research can help small businesses, support organizations, and other network actors identify opportunities and constraints within the micro and macro entrepreneur ecosystem (Vedula & Kim, 2019). The Textile and Apparel industry comprises complex networks that include design, production, and distribution. Compared to the more extensive literature on this subject, there is limited research on ecosystems within the textile and apparel industry. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the ecosystem research approach in the global Textile and Apparel Industry with a focus and call to action in the following areas: Public Policy and Government Support, Human Capital, and Sustainability and Resources.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Defined. According to the World Economic Forum (2013), entrepreneurial ecosystems consist of eight specific pillars: 1) access to markets, 2) adequate human resource capacity, 3) appropriate funding from various sources, 4) support mechanisms comprising advisors, professional services, incubators/accelerators and network of entrepreneurial peers, 5) regulatory framework and infrastructure that includes tax incentives, business-friendly legislation, and internet access, 7) access to university entrepreneurship education and training that promotes a culture of entrepreneurship, idea generation, and trained graduates with a venture orientation and 8) a culture that respects research, entrepreneurs, and innovation

Public Policy and Government Support. Salonoja (2013) explored the Finnish fashion ecosystem's underdevelopment compared to Sweden and Denmark. Researchers found that both Denmark and Sweden's government strategic support, public policies, and the private sector have had a significant role in developing the nation's fashion ecosystem. As the empirical findings

indicate, involving the private sector in this process would be vital as they have the genuine motivation to develop the markets (Isenberg, 2010).

Human Capital and Education. Lazzeretti and Capone (2020) researched the role education plays in the entrepreneurial ecosystem for the 'Made in Italy Tuscany Academy' (MITA) a specialized two-year higher education technical school aimed at training highly qualified technicians in response to the fashion labor market's needs. This study highlights the dense network formed around MITA, its role in educating creative artisans, and displays the ecosystem's local clusters. The study found that MITA connected students to local apparel firms, resulting in a stronger connection and supporting and developing the ecosystem. There has been a focus on designers or high-level human capital in creative (or fashion) cities. In comparison, creative artisans' or manufacturing workers' education is poorly studied, although they are crucial for manufacturing fashion cities.

Sustainability. The European Commission mapped fashion sustainability initiatives, recycling centers, support organizations, and networks to facilitate the transition toward sustainability and circularity in fashion and textiles (Draghi, 2019). Researchers determined geographic trends by mapping concentrations of small/micro-enterprises, support organizations, and R&D for sustainability in the apparel industry. Although each country has its nuances, a conclusion drawn from the study suggested establishing best practices to increase sustainability efforts across the EU.

Resources. A 2006 study looked extensively into the North Carolina Textile Complex (fiber through consumer, with auxiliary firms) (Frederick, Cassill, Godfrey & Little, 2007). The researchers developed descriptive profiles for each geographic cluster of the North Carolina Textile Complex and created visual representations on a map. The researchers determined that the industry clusters formed had the following influences a) initial presence of resources (natural, textile-related, human), and (b) proximity to central transportation infrastructure.

As of the time of writing, the Biden presidential administration put forth The American Jobs Plan, focused on reimagining and rebuilding a new economy in the United States. Many of the plans' focal points have the potential to positively impact US fashion ecosystems and entrepreneurs' success. For instance, the plan outlines the need to improve infrastructure, job creation, revitalization of manufacturing, and securing supply chains, all of which have been found to be key factors in building textile and apparel EE success. Researchers have the potential to play a more active role in workforce development for the industry. Further research could impact the effort to identify, track and connect sustainability best practices across the industry. Data visualization can help to map textile and apparel ecosystem clusters across the country and can help identify how infrastructure improvement can advance supply chain opportunities. Overall, increased entrepreneurial ecosystem research in the textile and apparel industry can begin to build strong public leadership policies, and advocacy for entrepreneurs.

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