

## **BERLIN: PAVING ITS RUNWAY TO THE FIFTH GLOBAL FASHION CITY?**

WHY PLACE MATTERS: EXPLORING WHY FASHION ENTREPRENEURS CHOOSE  
TO LOCATE AND CLUSTER IN BERLIN



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## **ABSTRACT**

Berlin has emerged as a multicultural, diverse, and cosmopolitan city, attracting creative entrepreneurs from around the globe. Renowned for its creative and open atmosphere, Berlin has positioned itself as a thriving hub for the creative and cultural industries. Despite the city's remarkable growth driven by its strengths in innovation and creativity, it has yet to establish itself as an established fashion center comparable to other global fashion capitals such as Paris, London, New York, or Milan.

This thesis investigates the factors that contribute to the locational behavior of fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin, while giving insights on place-specific factors that foster fashion entrepreneurship in the city. Furthermore, this study focuses on the spatial formation of the local fashion industry with specific emphasis on the creative clusters in Mitte, Kreuzberg, Neukoelln, and Prenzlauerberg. These neighbourhoods are particularly known for their high density of creative entrepreneurs and workers.

To gain insights into the reasons behind fashion entrepreneurs choosing to locate and cluster in Berlin, qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand their unique motivations, experiences, and perspectives, the appeal of the city as an attractive location for fashion entrepreneurship, and how this facilitates economic and regional development.

By examining Berlin's evolving fashion ecosystem, this research aims to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of clustering in the creative and cultural industries. The findings of this study contribute to the growing literature on clusters, creative placemaking, the geography of fashion and the symbolic power of place, providing insights into the factors that attract and sustain fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin. Furthermore, the study raises awareness of the supporting mechanisms that promote and nurture local entrepreneurship, ultimately assisting policymakers, industry stakeholders, and aspiring fashion entrepreneurs in strengthening Berlin's fashion industry and further propelling its growth.

## **Keywords**

creative clusters | locational behavior | fashion entrepreneurs | fashion city | creative placemaking | Berlin

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## 2 INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Research background

Numerous scholars have highlighted the significance of spatial agglomeration of creative industries, as clusters form in particular locations with creative and cultural atmospheres and consumption (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). While research has predominantly focused on the advantages of creative firms situated in clusters, studies exploring why individual creative entrepreneurs locate and cluster in specific areas remain limited (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010).

In 2006, Berlin, as the first German city, was recognized as *City of Design* by the UNESCO Creative Cities Network<sup>1</sup> maintaining its position until now. Although not yet a fully-fledged fashion center, Berlin is recognized as a significant hub for creative industries due to its diverse background, history, numerous regional and international creative networks, its open-minded atmosphere, educational opportunities, and more. Despite this, Berlin's fashion industry is relatively small in comparison to the other global fashion cities, also named *The Big Four* such as Paris, Milan, New York, and London (McRobbie, 2013). This distinction can be attributed to Berlin's absence of a conventional fashion heritage (McRobbie et al., 2016). Nevertheless, Berlin's growing reputation as the *City of Design* which entails the fashion domain, as well as its lively and diverse creative scene, positions it as an emerging and exciting destination for fashion entrepreneurs. The city's avant-garde and experimental fashion identity attracts a substantial number of independent fashion designers, labels, and fashion-related businesses (McRobbie, 2013). Consequently, its growing reputation as a fashion hub is of interest to many fashion entrepreneurs, who seek to capitalize on the city's existing creative scene and industrial clusters.

The objective of this research is to investigate how fashion entrepreneurs can utilize the concept of location as a means to enhance the value of their products and entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, it aims to analyze the impact of this approach on Berlin's unique identity as a global fashion city.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://projektzukunft.berlin.de/projekt-zukunft/services/internationale-kooperationen/unesco-creative-cities-network>

## 2.2 Research problem

Numerous studies from cultural economists, urban geographers, and economic geographers have examined the relationship between place, creative placemaking and the clustering of creative and cultural industries. Traditional research has focused on the benefits of locating near to other firms and industries, known as economies of agglomeration, being a key explanation for clustering (Hauge et al. 2009; Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008; Wenting et al., 2011). However, more recent studies challenge this notion and suggest that the presence of creative people in a place, rather than enterprises, are the driving force behind clustering. Florida's (2002) theory of the creative class argues that the attractiveness of a place for creative workers and the creative scene of a place are key factors in the clustering of creative industries. Other researchers have highlighted the role of entrepreneurship in cluster development (Scott, 2006; Storper & Scott, 2009).

Although existing literature acknowledges the distinct roles of place in both business and personal motives, there is a scarcity of research concerning the significance of place in the perspective of the creative entrepreneurs. The notion of the symbolic power of place and how this potentially leads to creative clusters has received limited attention in scholarly works so far. Particularly in the fashion industry, where the visual environment can influence the aesthetic values of a brand or physical outlook of a fashion product, the particular location can serve as places for inspiration and creativity through its symbolic power (Drake, 2003). Next to Drake's (2003) investigation into how locality stimulates creative entrepreneurs through the presence of communities, networks, the place as a brand and visual elements, Gilbert and Casadei's (2018) examination of the symbolic production of fashion in both global and "not-so-global" fashion cities, and Hauge et al. (2009) exploration of the connection between place and the creation of intangible values add to this relatively unexplored domain of how the symbolic power of place influences the locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs.



### 2.3 Research objective, goal and question

The research goal is to explain the locational behavior of entrepreneurs in new, emerging fashion clusters to add on the literature explaining clustering within the creative industries which has been primarily focused on the significance of agglomeration economics, the creative field and class of a city, and urban amenities. This investigation therefore will delve into three types of motives behind the selection of a location, including business and personal factors, as well as a third type, focussing on the symbolic power of place.

To investigate the distinctive place-specific factors that make fashion entrepreneurs choose Berlin as their location, this study has opted for a qualitative research strategy with a case study approach (Bryman, 2012). The city of Berlin possesses its own unique identity or symbolic power and arguably has the highest concentration of creative and cultural industries in Germany which drive the local economy inherently (Copercini, 2015). In Heebels & van Aalst's (2010) investigation about the creative clusters in Berlin's Prenzlauerberg and Kreuzberg neighbourhoods, they explored the place-specific factors through unique perspective of creative entrepreneurs. Therefore, I suggest employing qualitative research methods as a research strategy to gain meaningful insights from the unique perspectives of Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs.

The study follows three aims which are firstly, to explore the extent to which fashion entrepreneurs attribute the city's identity, symbolic power and intangible elements, like reputation, history, or narrative as a driver for their fashion-related entrepreneurial activities. Secondly, it examines whether fashion entrepreneurs use place as a reference in their branding strategies and marketing efforts. Finally, the study investigates the factors that influence the locational behavior of fashion entrepreneurs in choosing to locate their brand or enterprise in Berlin and clustering in specific neighbourhoods.

This research utilizes a qualitative study of creative clusters and locational behavior of Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs to address the primary research question: *why do fashion entrepreneurs choose to locate and cluster in Berlin?*

Thereby, the research centers on the past twenty years, specifically spanning the years 2000 to 2020, as this period witnessed a significant transformation in fashion-related activities in Berlin, particularly after the 2010s (McRobbie, 2013). Consequently, examining the evolution of creative clusters and fashion entrepreneurs' spatial formation a decade prior to and after this timeframe holds considerable interest. The results of this investigation

contribute an additional element to the comprehension of the spatial formation of the fashion industry within emerging fashion clusters.

## 2.4 Relevance and structure

This section of the chapter describes why this research is particularly important. Firstly, through an exploration of the correlation between the symbolic power of place and the establishment of clusters, this study provides a distinct viewpoint that adds to the current understanding of creative clusters. Secondly, by examining the specific case of Berlin, this study addresses micro-level issues that are relevant to macro-level policies in managing creative clusters, entrepreneurial ecosystems, as well as creative placemaking and -branding strategies. Furthermore, the study aims to consider the needs and motivations of creative entrepreneurs and how they engage with place, thereby providing a broader understanding of the dynamics of creative clusters. The results of this study could be valuable for policymakers, urban planners and the local government who aim to induce a self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystem and drive the local fashion industry in Berlin. Lastly, this study has a potential to provide insights into how Berlin can compete against the four existing global fashion cities while still maintaining its own fashion identity. Jansson and Power (2010) proposed that fashion enterprises can enhance the status of a global fashion city by referencing to city symbols and narratives into their branding and marketing strategies, and the findings of this study may contribute to this goal from an entrepreneurial perspective.

The thesis consists of three main parts which are a theoretical, methodological, and empirical part. The theoretical section is made up of three chapters that cover the themes clusters, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and the geography of the global fashion industry. These chapters provide a foundation for the chosen methodology, which is used to execute an in-depth analysis of the locational behavior of Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs. This will lead to the empirical section of the thesis, where the results and findings will be displayed and analyzed in detail.

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 Understanding Clusters and Entrepreneurs

##### 3.1.1 The empirical evidence of clusters and entrepreneurial ecosystems

Scholars from the fields of economic geography and urban economics have made several attempts to explain the reasons why specific industries, firms, or entrepreneurs cluster in certain regions and how these clusters can promote entrepreneurial activities. It is evident that clusters play an important role in driving entrepreneurial activities (Sternberg & Litzenger, 2004). One of the most well-known explanations of the economic importance of clusters stems from the seminal work of Porter (2000), who suggests that location amidst technological and globalization processes remains crucial in terms of competitiveness in the new creative and global economy. Porter (2000) identifies clusters as "[...] geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (e.g., universities, standards agencies, trade associations) in a particular field that compete but also cooperate" (Porter, 2000, p. 15). Clusters even drive competitive advantages such that companies benefit from local competitors (Porter, 2000).

The idea that firms cluster in agglomerations to gain productive efficiencies and increase information flow (Hebbels & van Aalst, 2010) was first proposed by Marshall (1920). He was primarily referring to the concentration of specialized industries in a particular locality, whereas Porter (2000) believes that clusters encompass companies that are interconnected and in close spatial proximity to further institutions such as universities and the government, related by skills, technologies, or common inputs.

The interconnectivity between industries and institutions not only fuels competitive advantages for firms that cluster in specific locations compared to those outside of clusters but also benefits new business formations. Porter (2000) highlights how entrepreneurs perceive the existence and growth of a cluster as a signal for business opportunities. Furthermore, this leads to a simpler way of identifying new gaps in products, services, or suppliers to fill with readily available assets, skills, and inputs at the cluster location.

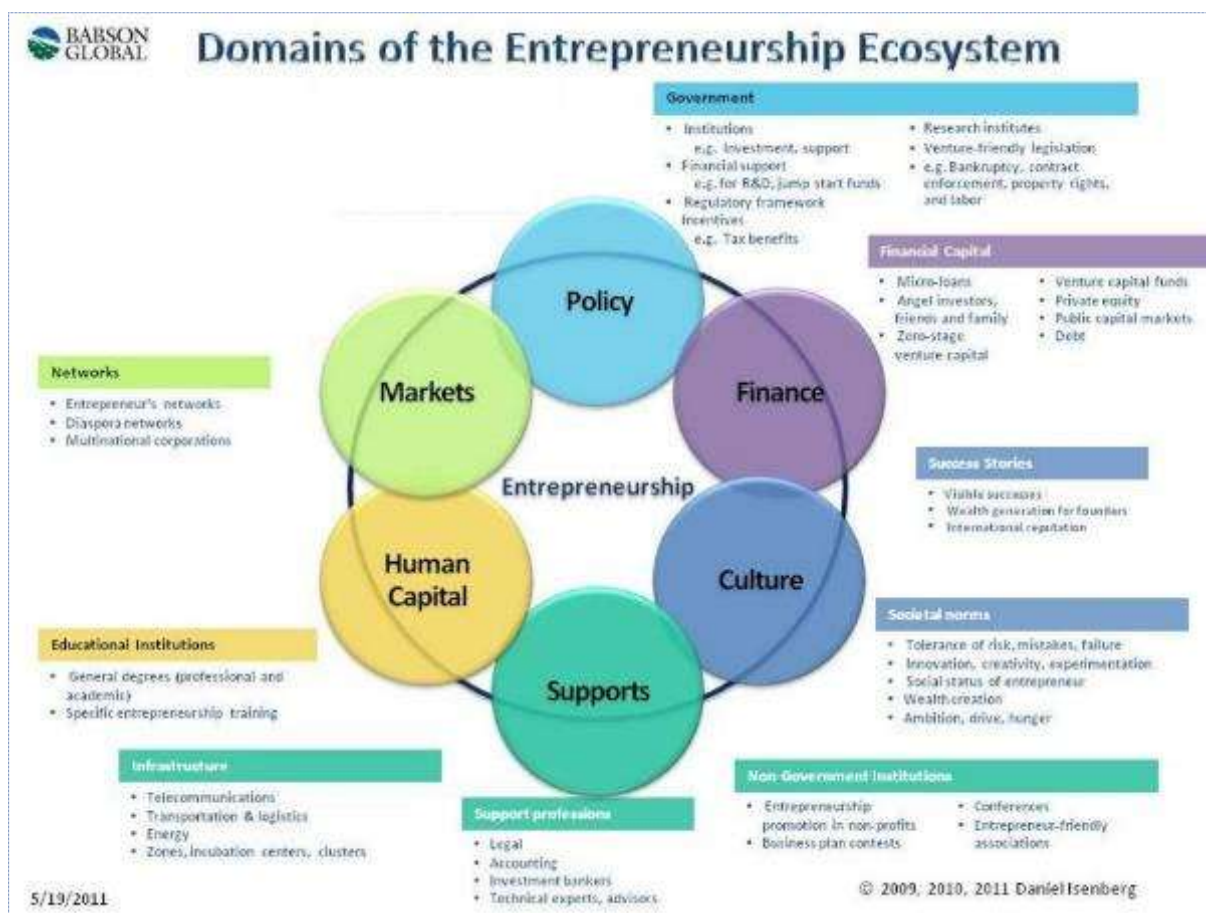
Additionally, a cluster can be characterized by lower barriers to entry and exit for firms and entrepreneurs and the co-existence of both competition and cooperation between competing firms. Clusters and new business formations can also occur through the presence of successful entrepreneurs that have already entered the cluster (Porter, 2000).

The present discussion about visible success stories of present entrepreneurs within a cluster that lead to the attraction of entrepreneurs leads to the introduction of Isenberg's (2010) framework on entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Isenberg's (2011) work proposes a model for self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystems within clusters, which encompasses critical elements that governments should consider. Within the framework, success stories of current entrepreneurs are categorized under the *culture* domain. The entrepreneurship ecosystem is composed of six domains in total, namely an empowering *culture, institutional and infrastructural support, finance, human capital, markets* and sufficient *policies*, as seen in Figure 1. The appearance of entrepreneurial ecosystems varies according to geographical locations and can thrive in clusters. However, Isenberg (2010) emphasizes that the government cannot create entrepreneurial clusters from scratch, but instead should build on existing ones as they are expected to grow organically and be self-sustaining. Sternberg and Litzenger (2004) assert that entrepreneurship contributes to regional economic development, and specific entrepreneurial activities and attitudes are region-bound. For creative and cultural industries such as art, design, fashion, film, and the performing arts, however, the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach remains a relatively unexplored domain (Loots et al., 2021).

Moreover, Krugman's seminal works in 1991 and 1998 contributed significantly to the empirical evidence of clusters. He expanded on existing urban economic and traditional location theories by introducing the *New Trade* and *New Growth* theories, leading to the development of a new location theory called *New Economic Geography (NEG)*, which explains how industrial clusters form. Krugman's (1991) core-periphery model posits that firms and workers are drawn towards the same region to reduce transportation costs of shipping goods, resulting in economic and regional growth. Krugman (1991) argues that the core area is where industrial clusters are formed, with agriculture surrounding it in the periphery. Krugman further contends that consumer preferences for diverse products and services drive diversity in clusters, which is a key component in attracting the creative class. Florida (2002) affirms this argument, stating that diversity is a vital factor in cluster development. In relation to Isenberg's (2010) entrepreneurship ecosystem domain of Human Capital, Florida (2002) extends the human capital theory by arguing that the new human capital of the urban economy is, in fact, creative people, also known as the *creative class*, who play a vital role in the economic growth of a region which will be addressed in the following part of this chapter.

Figure 1: Isenberg's Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, Source: Isenberg, 2011, p. 7



### 3.1.2 The new creative economy

In recent decades, the economy has undergone a transformation whereby human creativity has become a crucial production factor in a post-Fordist capitalist society. This shift has been observed since the 1970s and 1980s (Scott, 2006). Florida's (2002) seminal work on the locational behavior of creative people has emphasized the significance of the presence of creative and cultural industries in strengthening urban and local economic development. Him and Scott (2006) have extensively investigated the notions of the creative field and creative class, emphasizing the important role of creative people and entrepreneurs in driving the new creative economy within the spatial context.

The creative industries and the creative field that produce goods with symbolic value utilize space and location as an incubator to promote regional economic development, as well as increase entrepreneurial and innovative outcomes (Scott, 2006). These two mechanisms are intertwined, leading to economic growth in a region and the clustering of creative people within a region (Florida, 2002).

Such insights can be applied to the global fashion industry, which, according to Scott (2006), represents a growing share of employment and output in the new economy, stimulating local businesses, attracting visitors and tourists, enhancing branding, and fostering creativity. Moreover, a transformation in the geography of fashion seems to be taking place, with new fashion clusters forming in “not-so-global” fashion cities (Gilbert & Casadei, 2018), such as Berlin, that possess a distinctive urban style and have the possibility to gain a unique fashion identity by entrepreneurial cluster participants which contributes significantly to local economic growth (McRobbie, 2013).

### 3.1.3 The importance of place

With globalisation processes, the rise of the Internet and information technology, one might believe that geography, place and spatial concentrations of firms and workers do not play an important role in modern societies anymore. However, many scholars claim that place and the concentration of highly creative people in a region still do matter to drive local economic development (Florida, 2002). As the geographical concentration of networks of firms and workers, *clusters*, (Porter, 1998) leads to access to information, knowledge, social relationships and support systems, it can also act as a catalyst for creativity and innovation (Drake, 2003). Heebels & van Aalst (2010) proved this claim with a study on creative clusters within Berlin-based neighbourhoods, Kreuzberg and Prenzlauerberg. Therefore, not only are creative people drawn to creative clusters because of functional reasons, like employment and networking opportunities, or local and urban amenities (Florida, 2002) but also for intangible reasons like the *urban buzz* and *creative spirit in the air* (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). These so-called *creative centers* tend to rank higher in terms of innovation and spatial concentrations of interrelated industries (Florida, 2003). Furthermore, companies follow where creative people go as they expect a pool of local specialized and skilled labor which inevitably attracts even more creative people as local proximity is beneficial for social networking and consequently, informal knowledge sharing (Florida, 2003; Heebels & van Aalst, 2010).

Moreover, it is argued that place does matter, as “[...] social networks are grounded in particular places where culture is produced and consumed” (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010, p. 347). As a result, when the aesthetics and atmosphere of a location resonate with the surrounding environment and individuals residing there, it encourages the concentration of creative industries, next to the economic and social rationale (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). The notion of place is also expected to play a role in aesthetic creativity for a creative

enterprise and individualised creativity for creative entrepreneurs (Drake, 2003). In that notion, creative entrepreneurs can use locality as a source of innovation and creativity through the visual and raw materials, the urban buzz and excitement of a city or region and also use the specific region as a brand based on reputation and tradition. The symbolic power of place thereby plays a crucial role for the clustering of the creative industries (Drake, 2003).

To understand the importance of place and linkages between factors of tangible and intangible aspects of locality, such as urban amenities, inspiration and individualised creativity, it is needed to gain the perspective of creative entrepreneurs themselves (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010).

#### 3.1.4 Defining the cultural entrepreneur<sup>2</sup>

Within the field of cultural economics, there is a significant emphasis on defining the creative industries. In 1998, the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) provided a definition for the term *Creative Industries*. These include the domains of advertising, architecture, art, fashion, design, film and video, and the performing arts, such as music and are characterized as activities that produce a creative and aesthetic outcome (DCMS, 1998). Moreover, the concept of the creative and cultural industries (CCIs) frequently serves as an umbrella term in which knowledge, creativity, and intellectual property are of primary importance (DCMS, 1998). The CCIs encompass various entities and organizations operating within a market that is distinguished by the utilization of innovative ideas through social networks for both production and consumption (Potts et al., 2008). That notion implies that an entrepreneur in the CCIs thrives the most within collective action, as a social network refers to a interconnected community of individual agents who make decisions by observing and reacting to the actions or signals of other agents within the network (Potts et al., 2008). Therefore, the entrepreneur rather depends on social connections and linkages to gain assets, information, and knowledge about business opportunities (Scott, 2006).

Cultural entrepreneurship, in particular, is a notion that is currently heavily promoted by arts organizations. It is crucial to know precisely what the term refers to. In theory, an entrepreneur possesses the drive, courage, and hope to bring a vision to life. Furthermore, an entrepreneurs must be opportunity-seeking and creative, have a sense of self-awareness,

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<sup>2</sup> For the sake of the thesis, the terms *cultural entrepreneur* and *creative entrepreneur* will be used interchangeably.



persuasiveness, and must possess a proficient entrepreneurial and business-related skill set (Towse, 2010; Klamer, 2011). Especially in the fashion industry, entrepreneurs require not only high levels of creativity and innovation but also fashion design, business management, and manufacturing knowledge (Lang & Liu, 2019). What differentiates an entrepreneur from a cultural entrepreneur is the additional realization of cultural and aesthetic values and self-realization through their artistic and creative process. The primary goal of a cultural entrepreneur is not economic success but rather expressing their artistic and aesthetic content and generating interest in their art by involving stakeholders, generating funds, organizing communities, and building partnerships (Klamer, 2011). Cultural entrepreneurs, sometimes also referred to as *culturepreneurs*, are typically attracted to places with existing creative scenes and industrial clusters. They form professional scenes by networking, which are a prerequisite for the formation of creative milieus and spaces (Lange, 2011).

### 3.1.5 The creative field of a city

Creativity is a complex concept that can be defined in various ways, but it is generally regarded as the initial stage of production in the creative industries and can be generated by either individuals or enterprises (Towse, 2010). The relationship between cities and the new creative economy, with creativity and innovation at its core, has been shown to drive the local economy (Copercini, 2016). This highlights the importance of place, as creative and cultural entrepreneurs tend to seek out specific locations where culture is both produced and consumed (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). Therefore, the creative industries, including the fashion sector, tend to cluster more frequently (Wenting et al., 2011). Most studies on creative clusters have suggested that proximity to facilities, architecture, and people as well as the experience and meaning of the urban environment, the local buzz, and feel of a place are key factors in this phenomenon (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010).

For Florida (2002), the mere presence of creative people in a place leads to the attraction of more creative people, forming a creative class in a city or specific region. Furthermore, the creative field leads to the stimulation of innovation and economic development, as well as enhancing entrepreneurship through the symbolic value of a place (Scott, 2006). In his opinion, the concept of artistic gravitation and professional, as well as personal fulfillment among creative workers, lead to the clustering of creative people. Scott (2006) further developed the notion of the creative field and sought to answer why certain places develop into creative fields, with a focus on entrepreneurship and innovation. He

attributed the clustering of the creative industries to a cumulative causal process of industrial and entrepreneurial activities and social phenomena.

Berlin's creative sector has been steadily growing since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). Therefore, the study of the creative field is of great importance in exploring the spatial dynamics of the fashion industry in Berlin, particularly in terms of the relations between the city, fashion entrepreneurs as creative actors and the creative field in clusters.

### 3.1.6 Cultural entrepreneurs as creative placemakers

Creative placemaking is an approach that deliberately integrates creativity, culture and artistic practices into community redevelopment practices to foster the economic and social development of a place (Zitcer, 2020). Urban planners and policymakers aim to enhance the identity of a place through arts and culture. It is a relatively new concept that has gained momentum for cultural, and urban planners, and policymakers over the past decade. However, its efficacy remains a fuzzy concept as it is difficult to measure its impact, and there is ongoing confusion about key stakeholders in the creative placemaking process. The discourse about the creative class by Florida (2002) most likely coined the beginning of these efforts to attract creative people and visitors to a place. Scholars criticize that these projects by governmental and political stakeholders act as an invitation to the creative class to come in and take over existing communities and minorities of a place which drives gentrification processes (Zitcer, 2020). Another concept that entails the notion of placemaking, place branding, is a process that inscribes symbols and images to a place that represent its central, enduring, and distinctive characteristics, creating a focus of identity (Go et al., 2015). Culture is at the core of place branding as it makes a place unique and gives it a symbolic value next to its functional value. This process uses the uniqueness of individuals, often artists, to create associations between their creative work and identity of a place (Go et al., 2015).

However, the discourse around creative placemaking's inherent positive impact on economic development has been criticized for making places too homogenous, gentrified and being dangerous to established communities in regions (Zitcer, 2020). There is also confusion about the role of artists as cultural entrepreneurs in the creative placemaking process. While cultural entrepreneurs are key stakeholders in place branding, as they are founders of new ventures based on creative expression, aesthetic values and cultural production, they also have the power to reshape social structures and reorganize resources to forge social change and

unique communities (Loy, 2015). Ultimately, the success of place branding efforts depends on greater investment in cultural entrepreneurs and a focus on the pre-existing history, tradition and reputation of a place rather than forcefully implementing cultural policies in order to make a place more attractive for people within the creative and cultural industries. As for Isenberg's (2010) self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystem model where the entrepreneur is at its core, support systems and policies are in fact important and non-negotiable but for creative placemaking processes, a top-down approach by funders and policymakers to make a place more attractive to creative workers and visitors is sometimes rather suboptimal as a local identity of a place can not be created by urban planners but rather is a matter of the pre-existing identity and reputation of a specific region (Zitcer, 2020; Scaramanga, 2015).

## 3.2 On clustering of the creative and cultural industries

This section of the chapter focuses on studies that examine the reasons behind the clustering of creative individuals in specific geographic locations which determine local and regional economic growth. Scholars from various fields, including agglomeration economics, urban economics, and economic geography, offer different perspectives on this social phenomenon.

### 3.2.1 Urban amenities theory

One perspective of creative clustering is the theory of urban amenities, which asserts that creative individuals tend to concentrate in places that possess specific urban amenities and characteristics. The seminal work of Florida in 2002 is particularly influential. According to the creative class theory of Florida (2002), cities that possess cultural diversity and an open-minded, tolerant atmosphere can lead to the attraction and clustering of creative workers. Moreover, creative places offer a wide range of urban facilities, including affordable spaces, arts, culture and leisure opportunities, which align with aesthetic values, personal and professional habits and lifestyles of the creative class. According to Florida, people are inherently creative but solely unleash their creativity in places that offer a conducive environment and creative climate. As a result, firms follow places where creative people locate, and the presence of the creative class and firms attracts even more creative individuals, resulting in agglomeration. Florida (2003) suggests that a place with the following attributes contributes to an environment that attracts the creative class: talent, technology, and tolerance. According to Florida, natural, cultural, and built amenities attract talent to a place, and an open, inclusive, and diverse environment promotes innovation and economic growth.

Despite its influence, the creative class theory often falls under heavy criticism by scholars. Some doubt the effectiveness of attracting creative people and workers through policies that improve living conditions (Storper and Scott, 2009). Furthermore, the theory has not been studied enough to proof the stimulation of economical growth through the creative field of a city (Wenting et al., 2011). However, according to McRobbie (2013), fashion entrepreneurship and small-scale job creation are closely linked because creative individuals seek out affordable workspace. The Berlin city government, for example, seeks to reduce subsidies for affordable rents and spaces that are sought out by especially young creative workers. The reduction of subsidies in turn drives entrepreneurship and self-employment levels (McRobbie, 2013). The clustering of creative and cultural industries is not a one-

dimensional process. Lorenzen and Frederiksen (2008) emphasize that the creative industries and entrepreneurs rely on novelty and radical innovations and therefore require both localization and urbanization economies.

### 3.2.2 Localization economics

The concept of spatial clusters has been pioneered in academic literature by Marshall (1920), who introduced the concept of agglomeration economies to explain why similar firms tend to be located in the same geographic region.

Marshall identified three key elements that contribute to agglomeration economies: 1) the local flow of information and knowledge, 2) a local pool of skilled labor, and 3) the decrease of transportation and transaction costs due to spatial proximity of institutions and organizations. In the context of creative industries, these local inter-industry externalities and inter-firm migrations are crucial for the local firm and labor market (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). Furthermore, creative clusters are important for fostering a creative workforce that benefits the creative entrepreneur, therefore relying heavily on the local availability of skilled labor, innovation, and creativity (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010).

Additionally, a creative cluster enhances social networks, places to socialize and exchange knowledge which inherently drives creative entrepreneurship, leading to economic development within these clusters (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). These social networks can foster the creative scene and milieu where actors of the creative field benefit from intangible and visual elements of a place, like urban buzz, stimuli for creativity and innovation, or the creative spirit in the air which ultimately enhances the liveability and attractiveness of a specific place (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010).

### 3.2.3 Urbanization economics

The literature of localization economics emphasizes the importance of local networks, spatial proximity to firms and workers, and social relationships for creative clusters. However, diversity and urbanization economics are also considered relevant in this regard (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). As per Porter's (2000) seminal work, a cluster can be defined as a group of companies and institutions from a specific industry that are spatially in close proximity to each other. Porter (2000) argues that partnerships, collaborations and especially knowledge spillovers within a cluster are more crucial to productivity growth than the scale of individual firms.

Since in the fashion industry, entrepreneurs have a network with people from several creative industries, like the arts and music scene, photographers, as well as institutions and services, the agglomeration of a diversity of creative and cultural industries to drive the local economy is crucial within a cluster. (Storper & Scott, 2009; Gilbert & Casadei, 2018). Drake (2003) notes that the spatial proximity to cultural facilities, like bars, restaurants, and clubs, act as informal meeting and networking places that promote clustering of creative entrepreneurs in the fashion industry.

Furthermore, clusters usually form in places with the presence of universities, and research institutions that are globally connected and contribute to the local industry and labor market by bringing in new skills, knowledge, and ideas (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2008). These institutions may offer new programs in response to increased entrepreneurial activity in the area and collaborate with the fashion industry to intensify their relationships and access funding for research (Feldman et al., 2005). Furthermore, creative clusters shape the local context and reinforce norms, conventions, attitudes, and practices in creative industries such as design, as Vinodrai (2006) observed in her study in the case study of Toronto. In result, fashion graduates can establish and maintain their social and professional networks through these institutions, which results in a diversity of skilled workforce. Finally, another advantage of locating in a cluster is drawing further firms to these locations, therefore creating a self-sustaining ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship. McRobbie's (2013) study on Berlin-based female young fashion designers suggests that dense social networks and tight integration between key organizations benefit young fashion graduates to establish their business and entrepreneurial activities.

### 3.3 The geography of fashion

Understanding the locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs and reasons for the clustering of creative and cultural industries is crucial for the fashion industry. In this chapter, the focus will be on the spatial formation of established and emerging fashion centers and cities. In the third part of the chapter, it will be discussed whether geography matters for the contemporary fashion industry.

#### 3.3.1 Features of established fashion centers

The fashion sector displays a tendency to have only a few dominant clusters globally, namely Paris, London, Milan, and New York, which are also known as the *big four* global fashion cities (Brydges et al., 2021). These cities share a strong fashion and design heritage, possess place-specific characteristics, are sites for the most important fashion events, and determine fashion trends (Brydges et al., 2021). While globalization has affected the manufacturing and supply chain, the design and branding aspects of the fashion process occur in these cities as knowledge-intensive activities.

For instance, in Paris, the fashion industry began with the establishment of the first couture house in the 19th century, prompting many fashion entrepreneurs to relocate to Paris to learn and establish the business. This led to the creation of further spinoffs, and numerous couture designers who initiated their businesses. Paris' fashion cluster therefore can be traced back to these spinoffs, explaining the rich history and tradition of established fashion clusters (Wenting, 2008). Moreover, the emergence of Milan, London, and New York as global fashion cities can be attributed to the rise of ready-to-wear fashion in the 1950s, and their success can be explained by the same local spinoff dynamics that the Parisian haute couture scene experienced (Wenting, 2008). As the fashion industry is a complex network of various creative actors and institutions, these four global fashion cities have a high concentration of international buyers, fashion media, and finance (Brydges et al., 2021). Another place-specific characteristic that these cities share is field-configuring events, particularly fashion weeks. These events act as temporary clusters and are crucial in bringing together the local and global fashion industries into a single location, dominate the fashion calendar, and attract exclusive creative actors (Brydges et al., 2021). Overall, the spatial formation of the fashion industry in the global fashion cluster is a result of the local replication of organizational routines through spinoff creation, and the resulting lower entry barriers for creative entrepreneurs due to the

spin-off businesses and existence of creative scene and industries (Florida, 2002; Wenting, 2008).

### 3.3.2 Emergence of new fashion clusters

As the fashion industry gains increasing relevance in both cultural and economic geography, it has given rise to a new set of second-tier fashion cities, also known as "not-so-global" fashion cities. Currently, fashion clusters outside the global fashion cities reflect the spatial de-concentration of the fashion industry (Wenting, 2008). However, reasons for the emergence and attractiveness of local fashion clusters outside the four global fashion cities, which lack an extensive fashion history resulting in an organic place branding and fashion identity, remains insufficiently investigated in current literature (Brydges et al., 2021). These emerging fashion clusters that lack a long-standing fashion industry and hence organic place branding need to therefore explore alternative approaches to establish their unique paths and distinctiveness (Brydges et al., 2021). These fashion markets have forged their own unique paths and trajectories, exemplified by cities such as Antwerp, Copenhagen, and Berlin. McRobbie (2013) argues that these cities possess distinct urban styles and unique fashion identities fostered by local fashion designers and entrepreneurs.

Despite being classified as a typical "not-so-global" fashion city, Berlin's fashion industry has experienced rapid growth since 2010, to the extent that it might be able to compete against established fashion clusters (McRobbie, 2013). This growth is attributable to various factors, including the emergence of numerous small businesses, designer-owned boutiques that incorporate production spaces into their retail stores, fashion production projects doubling as co-working spaces, the bi-annual Berlin Fashion Week, the arrival of established fashion distributors and retailers, and a thriving cluster of local press, fashion media, and PR agencies (McRobbie, 2013). Furthermore, as fashion design workshops in Berlin lead to fashion entrepreneurs clustering in specific neighbourhoods, this process drives entrepreneurial attitudes in which Berlin has a possibility to establish as a new fashion cluster with a unique identity (Brydges & Hrcas, 2019; McRobbie, 2013; Sternberg & Litzenberger, 2004).

### 3.3.3 The importance of place for the fashion industry

The creative industries, particularly the fashion design industry, have been identified as an industry that prioritizes the production of goods for their symbolic and aesthetic value, rather



than for their utilitarian function (Wenting et al., 2011; Brydges et al., 2021). McRobbie (2013) suggests that fashion plays a crucial role in place marketing, urban branding, and tourism. The aesthetic value of a fashion product reflects the designer's capacity to comprehend and incorporate symbolic knowledge from the environment into a fashion product. Consequently, fashion entrepreneurs may harness the symbolic power of a particular place to brand their fashion products and draw inspiration from the creative and urban milieu of a city (Wenting, 2008; Drake, 2003; Mundelius, 2008).

The impact of digital technology on the fashion industry has been widely acknowledged in recent times (Brydges et al., 2021). This includes the transformation of traditional retailing platforms to online channels, and the use of blockchain technology to understand consumer behavior, amongst other innovations. Additionally, the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram has disrupted the conventional way in which fashion weeks were organized. Despite these changes, geography still matters for fashion. Scholars have highlighted that physical networking after industry events, such as the Milan Fashion Week, still plays a crucial role in the fashion industry. Furthermore, the value attached to the local geographic features of fashion products has led to a specialization in certain segments of the fashion industry (Brydges et al., 2021). This has resulted in place-based associations being cemented through social media. Additionally, the creative field of a city and its associated quality of life attributes also play a significant role in attracting fashion designers and entrepreneurs. Thus, it can be concluded that despite the rapid pace of technological changes, geography still remains a critical determinant in the fashion industry (Brydges et al., 2021).

Moreover, the city of Berlin has become an attractive location for fashion designers due to a variety of place-specific factors. One such factor is the availability of affordable space, which has fostered a culture of self-employment among designers (McRobbie, 2013). Additionally, Berlin's international and creative atmosphere has been noted as a contributing factor to the creation of clusters of creative and cultural industries, attracting fashion entrepreneurs to these sites. (Copercini, 2015; Brydges et al., 2021).

In general, cities that are deemed as creative or fashion hubs through symbols, location-specific associations and connections with the creative and cultural industries, including arts, culture, and fashion design, can benefit from positive associations with creative industries, such as fashion and design. Furthermore, the fashion sector has been proven to drive the local economy of a place which is why it increasingly is put in the agenda of municipalities (Jansson & Power, 2010). These officials have often leveraged their city's

favorable associations with the industry to promote their location as a desirable destination for creative businesses in a matter of creative placemaking strategies.

As per Drake (2003), the notion of place has the power to enhance individualised creativity which is encouraged by a positive, open-minded environment which attracts and retains creative talent, and can provide a competitive advantage for the specific region. Place can also serve as a source of inspiration, for example through the visual and intangible aspects of a place. At times, a location has the potential to transform into a recognized brand itself, and association to that specific place can contribute a significant value to the fashion brand. For instance, global fashion cities, like Paris, Milan, New York, and London, have long histories in the fashion sector, so that origin labels are utilized as strategic place branding strategies (Hauge et al., 2009; Jansson & Power, 2010). According to Power and Hauge (2008), brands convey symbolic knowledge and represent aesthetic, symbolic, and cultural values. Fashion entrepreneurs therefore sell with their fashion products also symbols and location-specific associations implemented in them, as a consequence of place branding (Jansson & Power, 2010).

A study conducted by McRobbie et al. (2016) reveals that Berlin's fashion industry is distinctively shaped by the city's alternative culture and activist history. The fashion micro-enterprises in Berlin are characterized by an alternative and avant-garde aesthetic, emphasizing sustainability and ethical production practices. The study suggests that this unique fashion style is inspired by Jil Sander, one of Germany's most renowned designers, and stands in contrast to the mainstream glamour and high-chic stereotypes typically associated with Italian designers such as Gucci and Versace. This distinctive aesthetic contributes to the fashion image of Berlin as a counter-cultural city. Furthermore, the study found that Berlin's fashion micro-enterprises tend to engage in collective networking and marketing efforts, as well as collaborating with other industries. This finding suggests that the fashion industry in Berlin is more integrated with other sectors and benefits from collective efforts, which may ultimately contribute to the success of the industry in the city.

### 3.4 Conclusion

#### 3.4.1 Insights for empirical analysis

The preceding literature review of this study examined theoretical and empirical literature on the clustering of creative and cultural industries, including the fashion industry, emergence of new clusters in emerging fashion cities, the relationship between place and the symbolic power of place, entrepreneurial ecosystems and creative placemaking.

The review showed that scholars from various fields like economic and urban geography, and cultural economics have been concerned with explaining creative clusters and the notion of place. It can be concluded, that the factors that lead to industry clusters are rather interconnected, with different factors leading to clusters emphasized in various studies. Human relationships and place-specific contexts turn out do be crucial for the presence of creative clusters while there are common processes at work in different clusters, the unique features of a place still influence the formation and success of clusters.

To conclude, the locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs can be attributed to three interrelated dimensions of enterprises, place and networks/people. These entrepreneurs choose their location based on business and personal motives and the preexisting identity of place in order to incorporate city symbols, history, narratives, etc. into their products and brand communication. However, there is a gap in sufficient studies on the role of the symbolic power of place.

#### 3.4.2 Theoretical framework

Based on these insights, this empirical research is now ready to commence. To facilitate the analysis, a framework incorporating the three key dimensions, namely enterprise, place and networks/people has been created. While these dimensions are interconnected, they have been separated for clarity purposes. The enterprise dimension includes factors such as firms, labor markets, retailers, distributors and specialized suppliers, which contribute to localization and urbanization economies. The networks/people dimension, on the other hand, focuses on human relationships and knowledge spillovers, including networking opportunities. The place dimension includes both tangible and intangible aspects, such as the visual environment of a place and the existence of a creative scene, or urban buzz. These dimensions with their respective associated keywords have been extensively discussed in the literature review. Specifically, the personal and business engagement of fashion entrepreneurs with Berlin will

be examined through semi-structured interviews with questions regarding their opinions and feelings about Berlin as a fashion city and the symbolic power of place in relationship to their brand, brand communication and marketing strategies, products, entrepreneurship and personal lifestyles.

The preceding literature review from chapters 3.1 to 3.3 has identified various concepts and theories that are relevant to understanding why fashion entrepreneurs choose to locate and cluster in specific neighbourhoods in Berlin. These keywords which stem from the literature review were selected based on their significance in describing the reasoning for the emergence of creative clusters and locational behavior of fashion entrepreneurs and are listed in Table 1. These keywords will also be incorporated into the interview guide, as depicted in Table 3.

Table 1: Visualization of theoretical framework, Source: own elaboration based on concepts of literature review

<b>Enterprise</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Networks/People</b>
<p><b>Firms and labour market</b> Competitors, Multinational, Suppliers, Labour pool, Manufacturers</p>	<p><b>Personal motives</b> Housing, Affordable space, Lifestyle, Living Standards, Friends/Family</p>	<p><b>Individuals</b> Entrepreneurs (same field) Other fashion-related entrepreneurs, e.g. fashion photographers, bloggers, influencers, fashion gatekeepers etc.</p>
<p><b>Institutions, services and channels</b> Universities, Institutions, Fashion events, trade fairs, pop-up-stores, showrooms Government (Berlin Senate)</p>	<p><b>Visual and built environment</b> Public spaces, Buildings, Architecture, Historical buildings and sites, parks, gardens etc.</p>	<p>Entrepreneurs and workers from different industries</p>
<p><b>Financial system</b> Financial benefits, support systems, Policies, Subsidies for the Arts etc.</p>	<p><b>Diversity of places to socialize</b> Street markets, bars, clubs, cafes, and restaurants</p>	<p><b>Networks and Communities</b> Social networks Personal networks Professional networks International networks Informal networks Communities of interest: ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ communities etc.</p>
	<p><b>Creative Clusters</b> Creative sector clustering in specific neighbourhoods/districts Creative milieu, Creative scene, Informal networks</p> <p><b>Intangible aspects/Look and feel</b> City reputation Place image/Place as brand Cultural aspects, e.g. identity, history, traditions, zeitgeist Atmosphere, e.g. tolerance, openness, inclusion and diversity</p>	

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Research strategy**

After the careful consideration of the research question and objectives, exploring the perspectives of fashion entrepreneurs will be done by the means of qualitative research as my research strategy which allows to understand unique perspectives from the viewpoint of people to further understand their locational behavior (Bryman, 2012). An inductive approach will be used to use data in order to shape theory, with relevant theoretical ideas on industry clustering and locational behavior of people in the creative and cultural industries. This approach allows for a gathering of rich, descriptive data that can provide deeper insights into the theories and concepts that were discussed before. Furthermore, by using qualitative research methods, a better understanding of the experiences, attitudes, and perspectives of the participants can be gained. Patterns in experience will be used to reach conclusions or generate new theories. Qualitative research also allows for flexibility and the ability to adapt to new insights as they arise during the research process. Overall, qualitative research will be the most effective strategy for addressing the research question and achieving the objectives of my study. The findings of this study could lead to new theoretical insights on the drivers of clustering for cultural entrepreneurs, particularly in relation to the symbolic power of place and creative placemaking.

## 4.2 Research design

A case study design has been chosen on the exploration of place-specific factors that lead to the locational behavior of fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin and aims to understand the complex social phenomena related to clustering in the creative industries in the unique case of Berlin. A case study deals with an “[...] intensive examination of a single case, in which they then engage in a theoretical analysis.” (Bryman, 2012, p.71). The problem of a case study is, however, as it looks at one particular city, in that case Berlin, it is not representative for other cities, and can not be used to generalize locational behavior and spatial formation in other emerging fashion cluster and already established fashion centers, including Paris, Milan, New York, and London. It is therefore essential to carefully evaluate the quality of a case study before drawing any conclusions and making decisions based on its findings.

This thesis focuses on the locational behavior of Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs and aims to understand the complex phenomena related to creative clusters. Furthermore, it aims to understand whether fashion entrepreneurs use references to the place in their branding and marketing efforts and whether the preexisting narrative of the city influences the locational behavior and creative processes of these entrepreneurs. Since the crossroads between clustering of the creative industries, the symbolic power of place and placemaking/-branding and how they influence each other have not been extensively studied through empirical research, this study aims to provide more insights into it. Furthermore, the goal of the thesis is to add a puzzle piece to what research has been done in the spatial formation and clustering of the creative and cultural industries.

### 4.3 Research method

To achieve the objective in exploring why fashion entrepreneurs choose Berlin as their location, fashion entrepreneurs in the selected regions were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to gain insights into their individual motivations for choosing the location. The collected data is expected to provide up-to-date information for comparison with existing literature on clustering in the creative industries, particularly the fashion industry. The research strategy, as described in the following paragraphs, is based on a qualitative approach for several reasons. Firstly, there is a lack of comprehensive qualitative studies in the field, and the study aims to contribute towards filling this gap by exploring missing elements in the development of Berlin's fashion entrepreneurial ecosystem. Secondly, qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of the reasons why fashion entrepreneurs choose specific locations based on their own frames of reference. As Bryman (2012) notes, this method enables researchers to see through the eyes of those being interviewed and investigate people in their natural environments. Thus, semi-structured interviews with a sample of fashion entrepreneurs were conducted to gather their insights and perspectives on the factors that attracted them to Berlin and how they have been impacted by the city's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen to deepen the understanding of the locational behavior for fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin. The interviews were not intended to produce statistically representative outcomes but rather to gain the unique perspectives of why fashion entrepreneurs choose to locate to Berlin and cluster in specific neighbourhoods. However, the outcomes of these interviews could still give possible explanations of the locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs and how place plays a role in enhancing entrepreneurial activities. The method of semi-structured interviews is intended to give the interviewees freedom and space to explore their perspectives on concepts relating to creative clustering, some which are also hard to contextualize, like the “look and feel” of a place, the “local buzz”, etc.

#### 4.3.1 Data sampling

The study aims to determine fashion entrepreneur clusters in Berlin. With the help of resources, including research papers about female fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin (McRobbie, 2013), personal networks from the author and the utilization of the Berlin Showroom map (<http://map.berlinshowroom.com/>) as well as Studio2Retail's Shopping Map



(<https://www.studio2retail.berlin/en/shopping-map>), I tried to find hints prior the empirical research on the spatial formation of fashion entrepreneurs in the city of Berlin.

This resulted in an overview of interview participants of different sorts: second-hand store owners, several independent fashion designers, a tailoring service, a fashion-related 3D artist as well as a fashion hub owner. Geographic restrictions have also been applied, mainly motivated by past research papers that conducted studies on Berlin's creative clusters by Barbara Heebels and Irina van Aalst in 2010 or Angela McRobbie in 2013, a personal observation and again the utilization of existing maps about designers and shops across the city.

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### **In brief: Berlin's creative districts**

The neighbourhoods Mitte and Prenzlauer Berg, acknowledged as the cultural and historical centers of Berlin, are home to numerous museums, galleries, and art institutions. The districts also accommodate fashion-related businesses, such as showrooms, boutiques, and design studios. Berlin-Kreuzberg is renowned for its bohemian vibe and diverse population, attracting artists, designers, and other creatives, as well as an extensive concentration of fashion-related businesses. Berlin-Neukoelln, on the other hand, is a thriving district that has gained popularity in recent years, particularly among artists and entrepreneurs (McRobbie, 2013).

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The participants interviewed for the study are Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs. Their primary entrepreneurial activity is within the neighbourhoods under investigation. All fashion entrepreneurs that satisfy the selection criteria outlined in Table 2 are recognized as suitable candidates to investigate the research inquiry and have been main respondents for semi-structured interviews, for which the interview guide can be seen at Table 3.

Table 2: Overview of selection criteria of interview participants

<p>FASHION ENTREPRENEUR</p>	<p>For the purpose of this study and according to Klamer’s (2011) definition of a cultural entrepreneur, a fashion entrepreneur would be someone who recognizes the value of cultural goods, in this case fashion, and is able to create/design, produce and distribute those goods in a way that generates value for themselves and others through effective marketing, navigating complex networks, creativity and possessing necessary management skills.</p>
<p>LOCATION OF ENTERPRISE/BRAND</p>	<p>Their enterprise is either physically located <u>in</u> or <u>closeby</u> one of these Berlin neighbourhoods: Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg, and Neukoelln AND/OR owning a digital fashion-related business/brand (online shop and marketing through social media sites).</p>
<p>YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT</p>	<p>Since Berlin’s fashion activities increased since 2010 (McRobbie, 2013), the research focuses on the period from 2000 to 2020. The entrepreneurial activity or founding of enterprise should have occurred in the past two decades or obtain a structural position within the clusters agenda during these years.</p>

Table 3: Overview of interview guide

<p><b>1. Introduction</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Show gratitude for the opportunity to meet, introduction of self and topic, explain interview duration and structure, and inform about recording for transcription purposes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Regarding the enterprise and brand</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explain briefly your brand, whether it is a physical or digital brand and which product(s) you offer. Explain your way of working and/or entrepreneurial activities.</li> <li>- What values and principles define your brand?</li> <li>- What does your brand/product represent?</li> </ul>

- Which tasks do you consider your primary operations? (e.g. marketing, design, development, production, sales, public relations, finance, accounting)
- Have you established any partnerships or collaborations with other enterprises and/or entrepreneurs located in Berlin?

### **3. About the city (exploring place/symbolic power of place)**

- How would you describe Berlin's DNA in a few words?

[According to McRobbie (2013), Berlin has a distinctive urban style and unique fashion identity compared to the "big four" global fashion cities, Paris, Milan, New York and London, and a more experimental and avant-garde fashion identity]

- How important are Berlin's culture, fashion identity, reputation, tradition and/or narratives for your business? What does they mean for you as an entrepreneur?
- Does being situated in Berlin align with the values of your brand and/or product(s), and if yes, please explain.
- Do you draw inspiration and creativity from Berlin's visual urban environment, its creative scene and milieu for your brand, business and/or entrepreneurship, and if so, how?

### **4. Brand communication and marketing (connecting place to product)**

- Does the communication or branding of you as an entrepreneur and/or your brand incorporate the name "Berlin" or any reference to the city? (e.g. in advertising campaigns, company name, brand or product lines, Instagram posts, or product labels.)
- What are the brand channels in Berlin that you utilize to convey your brand's value? (For instance, flagship/pop-up stores, showrooms, events such as Berlin Fashion Week, or other fashion formats and/or summits, organizations, networks or initiatives, partnerships, or physical visual urban elements like buildings.)

- In what ways does Berlin provide opportunities for you to communicate the intangible values of your brand and/or you as an entrepreneur?

#### **5. Reasons behind location selection**

- What motivated you to select Berlin as the location for your brand and/or for your entrepreneurial activities?
- To what extent did Berlin's reputation as a fashion/creative city factor into your decision to establish your business here?

Creative clusters in Berlin:

[According to Heebels & van Aalst (2010), there are some neighbourhoods have more clusters of creative entrepreneurs than others, because of functional reasons like informal networks, local opportunities, etc. but also symbolic value, like local buzz, the noise of the city, or just a creative spirit in the air etc.]

- Why did you choose one of these neighbourhoods for your brand and/or you as an entrepreneur? (Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg or Neukoelln)
- Can you share your thoughts on the current location of your business in Berlin? Are you content with it or do you have any concerns?
- Have you ever contemplated relocating your business to another city or region?
- What benefits or advantages would your business and/or brand lose if it were to move away from Berlin?
- In today's global and digital business landscape, do you believe *place* still matters still crucial for your operations or for the modern fashion industry in general? Please explain your reasoning.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Ensuring all topics are covered, provide opportunity for additional comments from participant, inquire if participant wishes to receive the results, specify timeframe, end the

interview with gratitude for the participant's time, and ask for fashion entrepreneurs in their network to interview (snowball sampling).

Based on the selection criteria, a list of approximately thirty possible interview participants was made of fashion entrepreneurs located in or around the neighbourhoods of Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg and Neukoelln and possessing fashion-related entrepreneurial activities of diverse forms, like owning their own fashion label, owning a fashion hub that carefully curates designer pieces, owning a vintage second-hand store, or working for a Berlin-based fashion house amongst others. Only one interviewee is located in Hoppegarten, Brandenburg which is closeby the Berlin district of Neukoelln but since his social and business related contacts all revolve in Berlin and he was born and raised in the city, he was included in the sample.

Over the course of one month from March to April 2023, interview requests (Appendix A & B) were sent out by e-mail and Instagram direct messages, in both English and German. A total of eleven fashion entrepreneurs expressed their willingness to participate, and subsequently, an interview was arranged as planned. The selection of eleven respondents as a sample for this study is deemed suitable, as the emphasis is placed on examining individual perspectives regarding locational behavior rather than making broad generalizations about all fashion entrepreneurs based in Berlin.

#### 4.3.2 Data collection

The thesis utilizes data from eleven semi-structured interviews that were conducted between 13 April 2023 and 3 May 2023. The interviews were carried out with fashion entrepreneurs who were either born or based in Berlin (N=11). A summary of the interview participants can be found in Table 4. Six interviews were conducted in the location of Berlin, mostly in either a café, the participant's office, store or studio, and lasted an average of 50 minutes. The rest of the interviews were conducted via video calls on Microsoft Teams. Out of all the interviews, six were conducted in English, while the remaining interviews were conducted in German. They were recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for further analysis.

In the empirical section of the thesis, direct quotations are incorporated, representing participants' ideas and experiences in their own words. These quotations, with some originally in German, have been translated to English by the author for inclusion in the thesis. The author has possession of the audio-recordings and transcripts and can provide them upon

request.

Moreover, Map 1 reveals the locations of the interview participants in Berlin. As the data sample also entails designers that either solely sell or create their brands on online channels or online shops, it is sometimes hard to distinguish their main locations. Some designers have their own studio and showroom close to their home but use other stores, retailers or distributors to sell their clothing pieces. Respondent J, Finn Dudek, is the only one living in Hoppegarten, Brandenburg which is at the Berlin border. However, since the respondent was born and raised in Berlin and has all of his social and business contacts in Berlin, while utilizing brand channels and networking sites in the city, he was included in the sample.

Table 4: Overview of interview participants

	<b>ENTERPRISE/ BRAND</b>	<b>MAIN LOCATION</b>	<b>RESPONDENT</b>	<b>INTERVIEW DATE</b>	<b>INTERVIEW DURATION</b>	<b>INTERVIEW LANGUAGE</b>
<b>A</b>	Voo Store	Oranienstr. 24, 10999 Berlin- Kreuzberg	Yasin Mújdeci, Founder and CEO	13 April 2023	42 minutes	English
<b>B</b>	Kai Gerhardt	Niemetzstr.6, 12055 Berlin	Kai Gerhardt, Founder and Designer	16 April 2023	80 minutes	German
<b>C</b>	Fajny/fajna Kilo Second- hand & Vintage	Nostitzstr. 14, 10961 Berlin- Kreuzberg	Zuzanne Guhs, Founder	17 April 2023	52 minutes	German
<b>D</b>	N Atelier - tailor studio Berlin	Willmannsdamm 17, 10827 Berlin- Schoeneberg	Esra Ünütürk, Designer and Tailor	18 April 2023	48 minutes	English
<b>E</b>	Kauf Dich Glücklich	Oderberger Str. 44, 10435 Berlin- Prenzlauerberg	Christoph Munier, Co-Founder and CEO	19 April 2023	48 minutes	German
<b>F</b>	GmbH	Gneisenastr. 66-67, 10961 Berlin- Kreuzberg	Manal Fathi, Designer and Development	20 April 2023	60 minutes	English
<b>G</b>	True Die	Oranienstr. 9, 10997 Berlin- Kreuzberg	Enis Efe, Founder and Designer	22 April 2023	33 minutes	German

<b>H</b>	Ioannes	Studio close to Schlesisches Tor, 10997 Berlin-Kreuzberg	Johannes Boehl Cronau, Founder and Designer	26 April 2023	55 minutes	English
<b>I</b>	Martinez Diego	Emserstr. 118, 12051 Berlin-Neukoelln	Martinez Diego, Founder and Designer	26 April 2023	45 minutes	English
<b>J</b>	Kaumstudios	Home in Hoppegarten, Brandenburg	Finn Dudek, Founder	28 April 2023	40 minutes	English
<b>K</b>	Archive Berlin Thrift Store	Rosenthaler Str. 72, 10119 Berlin-Mitte	Can Batman, Co-Founder and CEO	3 May 2023	40 minutes	German

Map 1: Visualization of location of interview participants in research areas.



### 4.3.3 Data analysis

This qualitative study serves a purpose in which the goal is to shape new theories on already existing ones through a case study. The research question along with relevant theoretical concepts from the literature review, formed the initial theoretical framework, as shown in Table 1.

After having gathered data with a selection of eleven interview participants to make sense of their locational behavior in Berlin, the data analysis now entails managing, analysing and interpreting the interview transcripts thematically with the help of coding. Coding refers to the process of breaking down data into component parts and giving them names (Bryman, 2012). Bryman (2012) introduces relevant coding methods for current research, like open coding, where data is broken down to themes and put back together by another coding technique, called axial coding. To connect the data analysis process with the theoretical framework, I use open and axial coding techniques to identify thematic phrases, sentences, or words from the transcribed interviews, with the aim of reducing the data. The visualization from the theoretical framework derived from the concepts discussed in the literature review (Table 1) account for some pre-established codes to which some were added, altered or deleted during the coding process. This resulted in the final coding frame, which is shown in Table 5.

The data analysis firstly involved the process of manually analyzing all eleven interview transcripts, categorizing the dialogue into various predefined codes and subcodes. Subsequently, the coded information was incorporated into the coding framework using the Atlas.ti software, allowing for the identification of shared themes, discrepancies, recurring patterns, and overarching themes. Through this approach, a coherent narrative emerged from the data by identifying consistent patterns across the entire dataset. An illustration of the citation and code manager's user interface within the Atlas.ti software can be found in Appendix C and D.



Table 5: Coding frame, Source: own elaboration derived from visualization of theoretical framework

THEMES	CODES	SUBCODES
<b>ENTERPRISE/BRAND</b>	Label I: Values	Craftmanship, Tailoring, Sustainability, Identity, Inclusivity, Free expression, Art, Female Empowerment, Fashion, Heritage, Mission, Vision
	Label II: Entrepreneurship	Motivation, Fashion, Primary Operations
	Label III: Partnerships/Collaborations	Partnerships, Collaborations with other creatives/entrepreneurs in Berlin
<b>BERLIN</b>	Label I: Berlin intangible	Berlin's DNA, Culture, Reputation, Narrative, Atmosphere
	Label II: Berlin fashion city/ identity	Fashion identity, fashion city, other fashion cities
	Label III: Berlin visual	Visual environment, Architecture, Buildings, Spaces, Inhabitants, Places to socialize
	Label IV: Berlin private	Personal motives, Family/Friends, Lifestyle, Living standards, Liveability, Residence
<b>BRAND COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING</b>	Label I: Branding	Place as brand name, reference to city
	Label II: Marketing / Brand channels	Marketing opportunities in Berlin (e.g. flagship stores, pop-up stores, events, fashion fairs/weeks, trade shows, networking events, initiatives, visual urban elements), Online presence e.g. on Social Media
<b>LOCATIONAL CHOICE</b>	Label I: Financial	Affordable spaces, rent, capital
	Label II: Institutions and services	Fashion education, Media, Universities, Institutions, Fashion-related events, Public Support, Governmental support

Label III: Districts	Reasons for locating in neighbourhood Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg, Neukoelln or closeby, Creative Clusters
Label IV: Individuals/Networks	Consumers, Clients, Professional and informal networks, Entrepreneurs from same or different field, Creative people, Communities of interest
Label V: Firms and Labour market	Skilled labor, Suppliers, Manufacturers, Retailers, Competitors, Skilled labors
Label VI: Infrastructure	Transportation, Proximity to other places
Label VII: Symbolic value/Inspiration	Local Buzz, Creative spirit in the air, Inspiration, Creativity
Label VIII: Globalisation and Importance of Place	Digitalisation, Importance of Location for Fashion Industry

## 5 RESULTS

This study aimed to investigate the reasons behind the tendency of fashion entrepreneurs to establish their businesses, brands, and/or entrepreneurial activities in Berlin and cluster in specific neighbourhoods known as creative hubs, specifically in the research areas Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Schoeneberg, Kreuzberg, and Neukoelln. The objective of this research was to assess the influence of the city's preexisting reputation, fashion identity, narrative, and symbolic power on the locational decisions, and to explore whether the fashion entrepreneurs considered factors such as placemaking and place branding in their reasoning. The research also examined the factors that influenced the entrepreneurs' choice to operate from Berlin and the specific associations they make with the city. Additionally, the study explored whether the entrepreneurs incorporate the notion of Berlin into their brand communication and marketing strategies, and whether they believe that place still matters in the current globalized and digitalized landscape of the fashion industry.

The first part of the following chapter provides a brief introduction to the interviews conducted with fashion entrepreneurs and their businesses, outlining the main reasons why they chose Berlin as their location. The second paragraph discusses the liveability and attractiveness of Berlin, place-based associations that the entrepreneurs have with the city and whether they use these associations and visual environment as creative inspiration or as a way to enhance their brand's values. The final paragraph emphasizes the experienced benefits the fashion entrepreneurs gain in clusters and creative hubs with a focus on different elements of the creative field, such as networks, financial capital, firms, and the labor market, institutions and services, and infrastructure as well as assumptions of whether Berlin can be competing with established global fashion cities. The chapter concludes with drawing a relationship between existing literature and insights gained from the empirical research as well as suggestions for future research. It also aims to provide an assumption of whether Berlin can be competing with established global fashion cities.

Lastly, it should be emphasized that fashion entrepreneurs in this sample are varying in terms of their characteristics, pre-entry experience, and entrepreneurial attitudes. Therefore, the insights gained from analyzing each individual entrepreneur should not be assumed to apply to other entrepreneurs. The sample includes a range of fashion entrepreneurs with different businesses, from a tailor studio, to fashion hub, a digital creative agency to

independent fashion labels. Additionally, the sample includes entrepreneurs that primarily sell locally, as well as those with an international network of customers, wholesalers and retailers.

## 5.1 Fashion entrepreneurs and their main motivations behind location selection

The descriptions of each fashion entrepreneur and their enterprise/brand included in this study were created using data obtained from interviews with the fashion entrepreneurs. The text underlined in each introduction of the fashion entrepreneur's brand indicates the primary reason for the respondent's decision to choose Berlin as their location. This section of the chapter may also encompass perspectives on the factors that contribute to Berlin's status as a fashion city. Furthermore, in the following section, multiple photographs of selected enterprises will be presented to showcase how the visual environment of the city gets translated into visual elements of the stores, which will be further examined in due course.

### 5.1.1 Yasin Mijdeci, Voo Store

Yasin Mijdeci, an entrepreneur and founder and CEO of Voo Store, has established an internationally recognized fashion hub and retail concept store located in a former industrial building situated in the backyard of Oranienstrasse in Berlin-Kreuzberg. The store opened 2013 and offers a wide selection of high-end fashion pieces from prominent brands such as Jacquemus, Jil Sander, Prada, and Gucci, as well as emerging Berlin-based designers like Ioannes or GmbH. Yasin Mijdeci's vision for Voo Store was to create a networking space rather than a luxury store.

Originally from Turkey, Mijdeci relocated to Germany for his studies where he established a career in gastronomy before transitioning to the fashion industry in his late twenties.

Mijdeci selected Berlin as the location for Voo Store due to the city's supportive entrepreneurial environment that enables business ventures to develop from scratch without substantial financial capital.

“It's something rough. And I think Berlin gave us the possibility to do something. For example, Voo Store. I can't open Voo Store somewhere else around the world. [...] this is the freedom. [...] you can do whatever you want. You know, this is the most important thing.”

Figure 2: Layout of Voo Store, Photo by Alin Daghestani



### 5.1.2 Kai Gerhardt, Kai Gerhardt

Kai Gerhardt, originally from Dresden, is the founder and designer of his independent fashion label with the same name. He relocated to Berlin to pursue his studies in Fashion Design at the prestigious Berlin University of the Arts (UdK), one of the largest and most diversified universities of the arts worldwide, where he launched his first commercial collection in 2017, two years after his graduation.

Kai Gerhardt's decision to locate in Berlin was primarily motivated by his aspiration to study fashion and the city's affordable cost of living.

“The first choice was naturally motivated by personal reasons. Unfortunately, there is no other city in Germany where I could imagine moving to. And of course, the plan was to study fashion here first. However, things have changed now. Berlin used to be an inexpensive place to live, but a lot has happened since then. I believe this is also why there are many creatives here, because Berlin used to be really affordable in terms of cost of living, rent, and everything.”

### 5.1.3 Zuzanna Guhs, Fajny/fajna Kilo Secondhand & Vintage

Zuzanne Guhs is the owner and founder of fajny/fajna Kilo Secondhand & Vintage, a vintage store that operates under the kilo principle for the sale of second-hand clothing. Originally from Poland, she sought to introduce the renowned kilo second-hand store concept, widely popular in her home country, to Berlin. Through personal contacts, she secured an affordable location in the Bergmann-Kiez<sup>3</sup> in Berlin-Kreuzberg, which is a notable hotspot for vintage stores and has been running her business successfully since 2022. However, her entrepreneurial nature and aspirations to establish a second-hand store in Berlin had been in motion long before the present time.

While Zuzanna Guhs does not consider Berlin to be a well-established fashion city, she recognizes and values the city's uniqueness, which fosters a climate for creative expression and experimentation for creative people. She opted to situate her business in close proximity to Bergmannstrasse in Kreuzberg due to its popularity as a vintage store hub and its appeal to a diverse range of visitors and walk-in customers.

“There are always many second-hand shops in the area. I think it would make sense to locate somewhere nearby. Being in close proximity to other second-hand shops means having a customer base that is already interested in buying second-hand. For example, there are several second-hand shops on Bergbahnstraße, which could be viewed as competition, but could also be seen as an opportunity to attract new customers.”

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<sup>3</sup> The German word "Kiez" is a colloquial term used in Berlin and some other cities in Germany to refer to a particular neighbourhood or district. The most common translation of "Kiez" into English is "neighbourhood," but it can also be translated as "district," "quarter," or "enclave," depending on the context.

Figure 3: Layout of fajny/fajna store, Photo by Alin Daghestani



#### 5.1.4 Esra Ünlütürk, N Atelier tailor studio Berlin

Esra Ünlütürk is a fashion entrepreneur who has been operating a tailoring service and atelier with her mother since 2018. Their tailor studio, N Atelier, is located in the Crelle-Kiez in Schoeneberg, in close proximity to the Kreuzberg neighbourhood, where she was born and raised. Their enterprise is dedicated to the love of craftsmanship, tailoring, and fashion, with a focus on promoting female entrepreneurship.

In addition to her personal affection for the city, there are numerous reasons why she believes her business particularly flourishes in a place like Berlin, such as the city's affordability, creative spirit of the city, concentration of individuals from creative and cultural industries, and the diverse opportunities for collaborations and partnerships with many like-minded fashion entrepreneurs.

“[...] you can just go in Kreuzberg in the Bergmann-Kiez, go vintage shopping, enjoy the best coffee, having so many little boutiques in fashion thing with selected goods with high quality standards. That is something that makes Berlin more enjoyable. And I love that too. Even though I grew up there and it's changing to like it's sometimes this little bittersweet, and yeah, and Berlin attractiveness as a big metropole. It's attract so many young people. Because we are blessed. You're really blessed like in comparison to other big cities. It's still affordable, young creatives pilgrim here and building things up and have good synergies in events in partnerships in everything, because it's<sup>4</sup> just boosting your own

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<sup>4</sup> She refers here to Berlin's creative scene that subsequently boosts the creative energy of the respondent.



creative energy, too, and that's how it doesn't matter even in fashion, in art, in music, in like in the cultural field of arts emerging so much, and it's such a blessing. And it's really a ground where everything can nourish and grow. [...] and I'm witnessing through *N Atelier*; tailoring business and manufacturing, it's really to reflect back to that handmade goods, back to our “support your locals”.”

### 5.1.5 Christoph Munier, Kauf Dich Glücklich

Kauf Dich Glücklich is a German lifestyle brand that was established by Christoph Munier and his partner, Andrea Dahmen, in 2002. Initially, the brand operated as a small boutique and waffle shop in the Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhood of Berlin, retailing vintage furniture, clothing and accessories. Since then, it has grown to encompass multiple outlets across Germany and Europe, thereby making substantial contributions to the German fashion industry.

While Berlin was not a deliberate choice for the location of their brand, Christoph notes that Berlin has a reputation for setting trends on a low budget and is considered a place where people can freely express themselves without fear of judgment or restraint.

Additionally, compared to other major fashion capitals, Berlin is relatively affordable while still maintaining a strong international presence. Although the city's influence may not have a considerable economic impact on the brand, being based in Berlin carries a sense of heritage and pride for Christoph and his team which is a key factor in his locational behavior next to the affordability of the city. This highlights the importance of location in the contemporary fashion industry in the digital age.

“Yes, because in the end, one is always somewhere, so you cannot not be somewhere, and that's why I think it's a bit difficult that places are becoming increasingly similar to each other. [...] At the same time, many people are trying to connect their origins and identity to certain places, making them special and distinct from others. Everyone is trying to figure out what makes a place unique, as it presents a challenge in creating a good quality of life for people and providing reasons for living in a specific location. Therefore, I believe that places compete with each other.”

Figure 4: Layout of Kauf Dich glücklich HQ, Photo by Alin Daghestani



#### 5.1.6 Manal Fathi, GmbH

GmbH is an established fashion brand, established in 2016 by Serhat Isik and Benjamin Huseby. The label has gained prominence for its avant-garde fashion designs, which seamlessly blend traditional tailoring methods with cultural symbols, innovative materials, and fabrics. The brand's distinctive aesthetic has garnered worldwide recognition and has been showcased in high-profile fashion publications and global runway shows. Both creative directors also served as creative directors for the Italian fashion brand, Trussardi. They split

their time between Milan, Paris, and Berlin, with the latter serving as the headquarters of GmbH.

Manal Fathi, an Italian fashion graduate of Moroccan heritage, has been living in Berlin for seven months while working as a designer for GmbH. Furthermore, as she simultaneously studied fashion, Manal Fathi's graduation collection was heavily influenced by Berlin's visual environment. Manal Fathi is determined to locate her business in Berlin after graduating, preferring the city to other German fashion centers, such as Cologne or Duesseldorf, due to the presence of a thriving creative community and fashion-related events, which offer greater networking opportunities and increased visibility.

However, Manal Fathi acknowledges that the impact of social media may diminish the importance of location for fashion entrepreneurs' careers and reputations.

“You know, like there are a lot of people that can like maybe help you out. Just you know by connections by networking that maybe you don't have in Cologne. Even though, social media plays like a big role. You know, if you stand out on social media, then the location maybe doesn't matter as much so.”

#### 5.1.7 Enis Efe, True Die Berlin

True Die is a fashion label based in Berlin, which was established in 2020 by Berlin-born fashion entrepreneur Enis Efe. The brand sells its products through their online shops and two physical distributors in Berlin-Kreuzberg. Enis Efe is heavily influenced by the culture and visual environment of Berlin by frequently incorporating visual elements from the city into prints of his fashion collections.

He views Berlin as a creative hub that is favorable for fashion entrepreneurs due to its cultural diversity, networking opportunities and the constant flow of inspiration from its visual urban environment and various creative industries.

“[...] the industry and creative industries are in Berlin. That's why many people move to Berlin, [...] To get a foothold here, because here you can get to anyone, [...] Otherwise, if you have no idea you come from Bavaria or Cologne or other cities and villages in Germany, you can't just go directly and talk to them. [...] Everything is happening in Berlin, that's why I think everyone just wants to move to Berlin to network.”

### 5.1.8 Johannes Boehl Cronau, Ioannes

Ioannes is a fashion label that was founded 2019 by Johannes Boehl Cronau, a German fashion designer and creative director, in Paris. The brand's aesthetic combines elements of romanticism and grunge, traditional and unconventional designs, intelligence, and mischief. Johannes Boehl Cronau had previously lived in major fashion cities such as London, Paris, and Antwerp before moving to Berlin with his partner due to the limited space of his apartment and showroom in Paris. Johannes Boehl Cronau's designs are sold at Voo Store in Berlin and will soon be available at the prestigious KaDeWe<sup>5</sup>.

Despite Cronau's opinion that Berlin cannot be compared to other global fashion centers, which can be derived by the following statement, he prefers to live in the city due to its availability of large atelier spaces, quality of time and space, emotional distance from his practice, and better understanding of bureaucracy compared to France.

“I think that is sometimes what I'm missing in Berlin is like it doesn't feel, I don't want to say relevant, but it doesn't have the same urge in terms of newness and change as, let's say, London. I was also just in New York, but I mean then their like the top tier cities of being truly metropolitan, or cosmopolitan. Like London or New York really just shows that Paris and Berlin are still a bit provincial at times. [...] and I think Berlin is just looking a bit too much outwards in terms of what it wants to be in the fashion world and relies less on their own, like finding and relying on their own identity maybe a bit. So that's my opinion on it. I'm not against it. I just don't know what role I'm supposed to play in it. Or if even I have to because also we work here. [...] But also we fly constantly to our factories, which are part of them. [...] plus Fashion week in Paris, which is you know where we do sales.”

### 5.1.9 Diego Martinez, Martinez Diego

Diego Martinez is a fashion entrepreneur and designer who established his independent fashion label, called Martinez Diego in 2020. Originally from Columbia, he relocated to Berlin in the same year to simultaneously work as a fashion stylist assistant, quickly establishing a close working and business partnership with the stylist he was working for. Together, they opened a studio and showroom for Diego Martinez' brand in the Neukoelln neighbourhood, which allowed him to benefit from a close proximity to his clients.

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<sup>5</sup> KaDeWe (short for Kaufhaus des Westens, which means "Department Store of the West" in German) is a luxury department store located in Berlin, Germany. It is one of the largest department stores in Europe and was opened in 1907.

Martinez's decision to locate his brand in the Neukoelln neighbourhood stems from its affordability and networking opportunities, coupled with a customer base that aligns with his brand's experimental fashion style. However, he highlights the lack of investors and support systems for fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin and asserts that he would make more profits from his collections in London or New York due to the more willing customer base to pay a higher price.

"As the thing when you're running a business, if you want to grow and find people who will buy your products at the price point you're asking for, cities like New York or London make more sense. In Berlin, even though it's expensive, people don't want to spend money because they don't have it. There's really no investors, no money, and no opportunities like you have in other cities, making it a bit difficult."

#### 5.1.10 Finn Dudek, Kaumstudios

Finn Dudek, known by his Internet pseudonym Kaum, is a fashion entrepreneur and the founder of Kaumstudios, a digital creative agency that exists since 2022. Before the founding of his businesses, he was mainly a freelancer, engaging in fashion-related digital projects. Furthermore, he has collaborated with various Berlin-based and international fashion brands including Nike, Adidas, Coachella, Xbox, Low Light Studios, Ljubav, and frequently collaborates with fashion entrepreneurs from Berlin, such as Gerrit Jacob.

Due to the digital nature of his creative work, Dudek expresses a preference for a quieter living environment, finding the fast-paced nature of Berlin to be too overwhelming. However, the size of the city's creative industry and the opportunities for networking within this industry motivate him to reside in close proximity to Berlin, rather than any other German city.

Consequently, he acknowledges that the identity of a place plays a role in the creation of fashion-related entrepreneurial work, emphasizing that location still holds significance for the creative and fashion industry.

"I would say that to a certain point it<sup>6</sup> doesn't matter, but it depends on your intentions. So I, as I said, I wouldn't really if I were to move away from Berlin, I would probably move to another fashion melting pot simply because it provides benefit for my business as well. [...] So I'd say it definitely still plays a role and totally makes sense to be around these cities if you want to make it in fashion. [...] And I

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<sup>6</sup> He refers to the concept of „place“ or „location“.

definitely think that it<sup>7</sup> plays into your work and change the ways you approach art and creation and fashion. Because you meet different people. So, yeah, I'm probably Berlin biased at this point.”

### 5.1.11 Can Batman, Archive Berlin

Can Batman, originally from Stuttgart, Germany, is co-founder of Archive Berlin, a second-hand and vintage store that offers a carefully curated selection of second-hand clothing pieces. Located in the center of Berlin at Rosenthalerplatz since 2018, Archive Berlin has collaborated with other fashion-related brands such as Title Mag, United States-based April Walker, and German hip-hop musician Luciano, amongst other. Moreover, the store regularly organizes events and pop-up markets. Can Batman draws inspiration for his entrepreneurial activities from the diverse subcultures in Berlin, including the hip-hop and nightclub scenes, as well as multicultural communities and the Turkish guest worker culture. He emphasizes that the subcultured of music and fashion are intertwined in the city.

Berlin's appeal to Batman lies in the city's personal and business opportunities, as he believes it allows entrepreneurs to realize their entrepreneurial visions with freedom to explore their creativity. The city's diverse subcultures offer inspiration and contribute to the vibrancy of the fashion industry, as well as the cultural and social fabric of the city itself.

“[...] I always say Berlin is the playground for adults.”

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<sup>7</sup> Here, he refers to the “identity” of a place.

## 5.2 Location-specific associations, inspiration, brand communication and marketing

### 5.2.1 Liveability, financial capital and attractiveness

According to almost all interview participants, Berlin is perceived as an appealing location for both living and working. Furthermore, they associate the city's open-minded atmosphere, casual lifestyle, affordability of spaces, combined with its cultural diversity and entrepreneurial possibilities as key factors in its attractiveness. Especially the Kreuzberg and Neukoelln neighbourhoods were often preferred by respondents due to personal motives, like residence and liveability. Johannes Boehl Cronau expressed this reason in the following way:

“I think it just was price and space and I think it is the work. [...] I need my studio, [...] to reflect the lifestyle that I want. Like I want to have that little cute bakery around the corner, I want to have that neighbourhood life, that is what is definitely important to me. I want to just sit somewhere and have a coffee at four and eat a pastry. I want to have my go to restaurant around the corner I want to. [...] I need the neighbourhood vibe. I need that easiness and comfort and coziness. It's the lifestyle rather than the aesthetic.”

Berlin appears to facilitate the pursuit of innovative ideas with relatively low financial barriers to entry, as entrepreneurs seem to rely more on creativity, support from family/friends, networks, and access to specialized knowledge and resources than on extensive funding sources to develop and scale their ventures. Six respondents, namely Yasin Mijdeci, Kai Gerhardt, Zuzanna Guhs, Johannes Boehl Cronau, and Diego Martinez, who were queried on their rental expenses for studio, showroom, or store in Berlin, shared the perspective that the rents in Berlin were reasonable. Nevertheless, they acknowledged the observed trend of limited availability of spaces and increasing rental costs, which presents a possible threat for individuals in the creative industry who rely on these affordable spaces for their artistic practices.

Yasin Mijdeci expresses this in the following way:

“[...] all the capital cities you know, all the big cities, there you need a lot of money to open something. You know, here it's open with zero money, you know, and everything. [...] And I know Istanbul, for example, as a capital or a Munich or I don't know, Copenhagen, Paris, Milano. It is not possible. [...] With 27, you come with zero money and they say, okay, I rent a huge space and let's start. [...] not just money. It's just the, the people, you know, they support you and you see future there [...] and these capitals and the big cities is, is always like this, everything is settled. You know? You, you can't add something on top.“

The housing crisis in Berlin could also lead to the consumer base being less willing to spend more money for products from independent fashion designers. As stated by Kai Gerhardt:

“Berlin will remain a city of creatives, but most people who make a living from fashion never sell their items in Berlin.”

As Diego Martinez is also affected by the housing crisis and lack of generous consumer base, a response to my question, whether he ever considered at one point to relocate his business to a different city, he responded:

“100% mainly because in Berlin there is no money so. That’s the thing when you're running a business is that if you actually want to grow and you actually find people that will buy your things and all of these for the price that you're asking for, like New York will make more sense or London will make more sense because people actually pay these prices for things. In Berlin, even though it's expensive, people don't want to spend money because they don't have it you know.”

As the local distance of Berlin to other fashion centers also presents a challenge to some respondents, Johannes Boehl Cronau presents following obstacles for Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs from his personal experience after having lived in Paris, London, and Antwerp:

“I perceived Berlin as chaotic, unorganized, messy and at times ugly and, [...] It's a bit of an arranged marriage for me because I then moved to Paris, which in total I lived for almost nine years in Paris, four years in London, one year in Antwerp, in between and there is something about the cluster of those three cities because they're not that far from each other. So plus, they're not that far from my hometown, which is South of Frankfurt, which was just the three-and-a-half-hour train ride away from Paris or Antwerp over us. So, there was something that was locally very close to each other that I really like. So, I feel with Berlin [...] I feel a bit distanced.”

### 5.2.2 Place and symbolic power of place

The city of Berlin is undoubtedly a unique place, as expressed by all the participants in this study who have a personal connection to the city. This connection is especially relevant for entrepreneurs in the fashion industry who tend to integrate symbolic knowledge acquired from their surroundings into their products, potentially influencing their products' aesthetic components. The symbolic power from Berlin can be tangible or intangible, taking on many forms such as the urban buzz, open atmosphere, historical and traditional elements, built environment, as well as place image and reputation.

In accordance with the feedback provided by the respondents regarding the fashion identity of Berlin, a variety of perspectives emerged. Among the eleven respondents, three individuals (Esra Ünlütürk, Yasin Müjdeci, and Christoph Munier) expressed the opinion that Berlin or Germany lacks a distinctive fashion identity because of the relatively casual clothing style commonly observed among Germans. In their remarks, they frequently drew comparisons to



other prominent fashion cities such as Paris or Milan, where the residents are considered more fashion-forward. Esra Ünlütürk embraces this as a Berlin-born fashion entrepreneur and designer of her tailor studio N Atelier with the following statement:

“[...] in general, not only just Berlin but Germany was never that fashion city. When you go to Milan, everybody is dressed up, everyone has an aesthetic game. German and the German culture was never that into that. We are the land of engineering, technology. [...] it's actually is just Berlin [...] that has the highest stand on fashion business, and everything comes here together. And every business, every fashion house has his, I don't know, her flagship or his store or the pop up Berlin is on the map for Germany. But in comparison like you can't, Milan is different, Paris is different, New York is different thing for because they have longer history.”

“Berlin is not a fashion city. In Berlin, many fashion creators and fashion-loving people live.” (Kai Gerhardt)

On the contrary, Diego Martinez, independent Berlin-based fashion designer, recognized Berlin as an exceptional city with an avant-garde, edgy and experimental fashion identity which can support entrepreneurs in creating their fashion products.

“I think like Berlin has like. Is the edge. You know, it's like the weird kit of fashion. It's like the. I don't know. Like you have Paris, like being like, elegant and Milan also, but in a tackier way. And then you have, like, New York being also edgy and like rough, but also with a lot of money. I think Berlin is just poor and edgy and wants to be high, you know? So, like, I think that's how Berlin is with fashion. It's just like where the punk these days is sort of happening. [...] This definitely like affects like the way I do fashion. [...] That's maybe also why my brand is here.” (Diego Martinez)

Berlin's symbolic knowledge is evident in its renowned reputation and its recognition as a hub for the creative scene. Additionally, it has been acknowledged that variations in the identity and narrative of Berlin manifest across its diverse districts.

“Berlin, different from the rest of the country: more free, more closed, more crazy, more bourgeois. There are more extremes in Berlin than elsewhere, and every time you think that something is a certain way "here," and then you talk to someone who has never lived in Berlin, you realize that Berlin is such a huge bubble, divided into many small bubbles that are very different from what is happening outside of Berlin. [...] I would not limit it to a narrative that comes from fashion or culture. I actually need Berlin as a compact program.” (Kai Gerhardt)

“It's more Berlin's urban and visual style. For example, you can walk one street is like you stay on same street from the beginning to the end. And you go through so culturally different areas of Berlin. [...] And I love the contrast. Berlin is full of it, with the roughness and kindness and sweetness, but it's never boring. It's such, like, it's always in flow always happening something and that constant switch up from energies, it making something in my creative field and fuelling me up actually.” (Esra Ünlütürk)

Yasin Müjdecı's take on a “Berlin narrative” is expressed in the following way:

“[...] actually the narrative is kind of freedom.”

Furthermore, Enis Efe expressed that Berlin is a strong brand name and anticipated that his own brand will benefit from this association and incorporated visual elements of the city in the designs for his collections. None of the other participants indicated a deliberate utilization of Berlin's visual environment in their fashion products.

“And in fact, three months ago, we launched four different products where we selected pictures in Berlin that were interesting to us, especially in Kreuzberg. These included facades, for example, from Mehringdamm. The facades, as well as the typical telephone booths that were common in the past. [...] The best Döner can be found in Berlin, [...] And we tried to incorporate them into our pullovers, so we patched them out and sewed them on.” (Enis Efe)

When questioned about the significance of featuring Berlin's visual environment in their fashion products, the same respondent provided the following response:

"[...] we're trying to showcase our culture as much as possible. [...] We have many back prints that depict our culture. We want to package it in a way that when you look at it, you don't immediately see it, but when you take a closer look, you see the details that blend and mix with our culture and who we are."

Two respondents utilized or got inspired by Berlin's visual environment and symbolic associations, sometimes referred as the “Berlin flair”. Yasin Müjdeci implemented the roughness of the city and industrial design elements for his fashion hub when he built Voo Store inside a former old locksmith's shop, whereas store owner Zuzanna Guhs got inspired by the colorful graffiti, street art and murals in Neukoelln.

“It was this, this roughness of course.[...] this industrial design. [...] it was like a big fabric here inside. And after I saw this is, the place is empty, [...] this roughness of Berlin, you know, again, it's what make us. Free here. It's, everything's so rough. You can do it whatever you want. Yeah. You know, they give you this possibility and you know, it's a huge room and [...] All the cables, all the walls and kind of stuff. But it was the nice thing, you know, for me, and this is the, if you mean the Berlin aesthetic. Yes. Yeah. This, this thing.” (Yasin Müjdeci)

“[...] when I opened this shop and painted and made everything nice, some friends came and said, "You don't have to make it so nice. In Berlin, it has to have a certain flair, it can be a bit dirty. The walls can have peeling plaster, that's how it should be, right?" Here, in the front, they were sprayed with graffiti, and a friend said, "Now you're accepted here in the neighbourhood." [...] I think in Berlin, people don't mind that much. It doesn't have to be fancy. Somehow it doesn't bother people. [...] Yeah, when you walk around for so long, and I, for example, like different colors and so on, and that always inspires me, [...]. I always pass by a huge rooster in Neukölln, and it's very beautifully colorful.” (Zuzanna Guhs)

### 5.2.3 Connecting place to product

The notion of place can serve individualised creativity and inspiration, stemming from both visual and intangible aspects of a specific city or region. Consequently, place has the potential to contribute to the symbolic value of a product and brand communication, as well as marketing strategies of a brand. In this study, the creative entrepreneurs were inquired about their reliance on Berlin as a source of inspiration and, if so, how they drew from it. For the majority, inspiration was perceived as something intangible that influences the creative atmosphere, and tapping into it involved initiating an unconscious process. Articulating the connection between inspiration and place, particularly with regards to Berlin, proved to be a challenging question for most respondents. Nevertheless, the majority confirmed that they derive inspiration from the city, with no one denying Berlin's capacity to provide creative stimulation. The following statements exemplify how the visual environment of Berlin serves as a source of inspiration.

"It sounds clichéd, I think it happens unconsciously all the time because the thing is, no one can tell me or I believe no creative person leaves the office, flips the switch, and then nothing happens anymore. [...] I moved to Berlin without really knowing what I wanted to do [...] but of course, Berlin, as it is, influences my creative process. [...] these ugly and beautiful buildings, the contrasts, and the diverse people, they always leave an impression. It's like a temporary exhibition. It's hard for me to say whether it's the architecture, the art scene, or the fashion market that shapes me. Because I take something from everywhere. I can draw inspiration from anything and everything." (Kai Gerhardt)

"I think this collection, the one that I'm working on right now, has some aspects that inspire me from Berlin. I can't say much, but they're it's a bit like rough, you know, there's denim like, there's some fur, I see so much fur in Berlin for some reason. I don't know. Maybe because people are thrifting a lot and then wearing those, like, fur coats [...] You know, in techno parties in general, you see a lot of belts, you know, like those buckles. And I have a lot of buckles in my collection as well." (Manal Fathi)

"Right now, I'm looking into implementing 3D footage into real videos. So last week I just went to Berlin and went around and just looked at architecture and took videos of that to kind of implement 3D footage into that, so I'm sure there's some sense of inspiration that's in there because I kind of walk around the city and consciously say, all right, this is the architecture of Berlin that I want to implement into my art." (Finn Dudek)

While Can Batman acknowledges his limited awareness of the specific sources of his inspiration, he finds himself inspired by his immediate urban environment, as he expressed in the following statement:

"I can't really tell you what the subconscious does, but we do tend to draw inspiration from various things. [...] I believe that, to answer your question, it definitely influences me. Even people inspire me,

wherever I am. Berlin is definitely a crazy place, and things that have become normal for me, when I talk to friends from my hometown or other cities, they question whether it's really like that in Berlin. [...] For example, if you're walking around Kottbusser Tor, you don't think as much about what's happening there, whether there are homeless people or people with drug problems or people from diverse backgrounds. [...] I mean, that's just how it is. I'm sure that we definitely let ourselves be influenced, but I'm not actively searching the streets and saying, "Okay, I'm looking for a new style now, or something like that."

Besides being inspired by the urban environment of Berlin and especially by his neighbourhood Kreuzberg, Berlin-born Enis Efe derives creative stimulation from various other countries as well. Regarding his involvement in the fashion industry and the distinct fashion identity of his brand, he specifically identifies the United Kingdom, the United States and France as significant sources of inspiration and places that set fashion trends.

"So, I draw a lot of inspiration from the UK, from England. The way people dress there is just different. [...] In my opinion, Berlin is not a fashion city. I believe that when it comes to being fashion-forward, countries like France, England, and America take the lead. Berlin, on the other hand, seems to lag behind. Many people here try too hard, or rather, I feel that Germany is at a point where we follow the trends set by America, England, and France. We are more like followers rather than pioneers in the fashion scene."

The fashion entrepreneurs, either established or responsible for their own brands, understand the importance of positioning their brand to appeal to consumers' needs, wants, and expectations. This process, commonly known as branding, focuses on creating a positive image for the brand. On the other hand, marketing strategy involves practices to develop a market for the brand, also via brand channels, ultimately leading to sales.

When asked whether the city of Berlin is integrated into their branding or marketing efforts, some fashion entrepreneurs expressed their pride in being a company that originated and is firmly rooted in Berlin. As a result, many of them have chosen to incorporate the word "Berlin" into their brand's name.

Esra Ünlütürk, the owner of N Atelier, recognizes the crucial role Berlin plays in generating intangible symbolic value through online marketing efforts by expressing following statement:

"it is our narrative to say, we are Berlin-based and born. [...] It is on our social media biography, for sure, is always going to be standard, because we are proud to have that history, because it is the authenticity that you can't buy or can't get. [...] Berlin is a brand for itself. Everyone wants to be associated with Berlin with that "I'm Berlin-based". [...] And I think it has an highly attractiveness in sense of marketing, to can be associated with that city. Because that holds a kind of philosophy, an idea

and identity that is needed to connect more with your customers and the community that you try to build up.”

Berlin-born fashion entrepreneur Enis Efe also expressed his pride and deep connection in having a brand based in Berlin, evident through the incorporation of the title "Kreuzberg" in the logo of his brand, True Die. This neighbourhood holds personal significance for Enis as it is his birthplace. Furthermore, the area code of Berlin is also featured in many of his fashion product designs. Upon being asked for his reasoning, he responded with following statement:

"My own ego is like this, yes, but actually it's my ego. I simply want it, I just want everyone in the world to know Kreuzberg 1, actually everyone in the world to know. But I want it to be shown again, that we come from Kreuzberg and that we are different from everyone else.”

When asked about the significance of preserving the Berlin or Kreuzberg identity in case his business were to relocate outside of Berlin, Enis responded as follows:

"Always, yes, [...] no matter where I've been, I simply miss Kreuzberg. [...] I even miss the dirty ground from Berlin, no matter where I've been, even in clean cities, but Berlin, it's just Berlin.”

Despite being based in Berlin, some of the respondents exhibit a lack of significant engagement in incorporating references to the city within their brand communication and marketing strategy. The following statements were obtained from the respondents when asked about the importance of showcasing their brand as being based in Berlin.

“Not anymore [...] of course we, we need to say where we come from. Yeah, sure. But we don't make this cheap advertisement for us. [...] I mean, we are, we are more international, I would like to say.”  
(Yasin Müjdeci)

“I actually considered whether to do it, but on my website, in my 'About' text, it states that I am Berlin-based. However, it is more of a description of the fact. But otherwise, I do not integrate it into my marketing, and I don't want to. I prefer people to associate me with avant-garde rather than with Berlin because the external perception of Berlin is that everyone wears black and goes to Berghain. And so many people use this advertising with Berlin. Certainly, many also use avant-garde, but I prefer to use something that describes my style. However, I would never conceal the fact that I am from Berlin, but it doesn't necessarily have to be part of my advertising.” (Kai Gerhardt)

"On the contrary, actually not at all, [...] There's no significant advantage for me to include it or disadvantage to leave it out, [...] I would say it's based on facts because we are from Berlin.” (Can Batman)

### 5.3 Experienced cluster and entrepreneurship ecosystem benefits

#### 5.3.1 Presence of creative scene, markets, and human capital

The presence of a creative milieu of a creative entrepreneur holds significant importance as it provides opportunities for creative expression, professional, social and informal networks and an environment corresponding to a casual lifestyle.

Notably, neighbourhoods such as Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg, and Neukoelln have undergone a remarkable transformation into creative hubs, resulting in the clustering of creative entrepreneurs.

The co-founder of Kauf Dich Glücklich, Christoph Munier, describes this phenomenon as follows, thereby providing an explanation for why creative people and entrepreneurs tend to concentrate in specific districts:

“Districts such as Steglitz have remained relatively unchanged for 40 years. It is extremely challenging for significant changes to occur there quickly. There is no necessity for the introduction of specialty establishments like Italian restaurants or hipster cafes because they already have their established clientele and are successful. The residents own their properties above these establishments and bid farewell. However, there were certain areas that experienced dissolution after the reunification, such as the East, including Prenzlauer Berg. Back then, one could practically acquire apartments. Similar situations were observed in Mitte, where everything was on the brink of collapse, and Kreuzberg, [...] That's why people were attracted to these areas, and being centrally located made them even more appealing as a significant magnet. [...] They attract attention because there isn't a fixed community that has fully settled in.”

The inherent proximity of individuals and networks, including consumers, clients, professional and informal networks, fellow creative entrepreneurs, communities of interest, as well as skilled workforce, manufacturers, retailers, and competitors, is important for the spatial formation of entrepreneurs within specific neighbourhoods in Berlin. The presence of these interconnected markets and human capital, as defined by Isenberg (2010) across the six domains of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, holds significant importance in the establishment of a self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystem within Berlin's fashion cluster. As a reminder, the depiction of the ecosystem can be found in Figure 1.

The following statements provided by the respondents highlight the benefits derived from the clusters of creative workers, and individuals from various industries in enhancing their own businesses and brands.

“Well the business is located in our next door neighbourhood in Schoeneberg in Crellekiez. It's also a really sweet vibe there with that all the multicultural influences. So we have there every Tuesday and

Saturday, a big market there, too, the Turkish market that is actually from Maybachufer. [...] And there you have just everything, from herbs, fruits, vegetables, to fabrics, and garments and everything you have there too. We are connected with our fabric suppliers. From there too. We have a long friendship with their suppliers there too. And we are selling fabrics too. So we buying a lot. And so that's the attractiveness of that area in Schoeneberg, Crellekiez. Super close to Akazienkiez, too, where you have the same flair as Bergmannstrasse, too. It's hosting so much little boutique shops, coffee shops, and it's beautiful scenery to walk by. And a lot of art galleries and concept stores for design objects are located there, as well as our befriended manufacturer. So we have Goldsmith just around the corner, it's in the same house complex, where we can collaborate and work together [...] We are cooperating with our florist to have their pockets as we do bridal things. So we are building up a network, [...] Building a synergy for all of us and looking for ways to benefit both businesses.” (Esra Ünlütürk)

"During my studies, the Turkish market was my main go-to place, and we sometimes engaged in conversations with sellers when I needed materials for projects. I would ask if I could get more of a particular item, and their response would be, 'I'll have to check because we only receive leftovers.'" (Kai Gerhardt)

"I found a huge studio, which was within my budget, [...] Gave me a little community of creators in the same building. A friend of mine who's a painter is in the studio above me. An interior designer is next to me. There's like a furniture builder, so also do stuff for my studio in the front. [...] It's a very, very, very lovely setup." (Johannes Boehl Cronau)

While the majority of the respondents perceive Germany as a country lacking a genuine fashion culture, they acknowledge Berlin as a city with a vibrant fashion community, where individuals freely explore and experiment with their personal style, embracing the freedom to wear whatever they desire. This environment fosters creativity and serves as a source of inspiration, as evidenced by the following statements.

"Berlin is not a fashion city. In Berlin, there are many people involved in fashion creation and fashion enthusiasts. When you look at people walking around on the streets, [...] Interestingly, Maybachufer—I don't know why—but there are days when people, I think it's like, 'Let's take a walk by the canal and dress up a bit.' In the past, Kastanienallee used to be a place for that, which is why it was called “Casting”-Allee. It's all about being seen and seeing others. Apart from that, Mitte, Auguststrasse, and the park there (Pappelallee). I think there are not necessarily creatives there, but rather people who wear the creations of creatives. Most fashion designers I know don't have a particularly striking personal style, but there are many creatives here who wear the designs of these designers." (Kai Gerhardt)

“Berlin is poor and the economy is limited. [...] there's no place like in Antwerp or something where the whole city is somehow alive with diamonds and fashion, it's not like that here. Here, it's much more diversified across 1000 industries, and well, the fashion industry doesn't have any importance here. Maybe it does in Milan, but here, definitely not. [...] Berlin offers, apart from this creative scene, what they offer here is freedom, so to say, and that's really cool, maybe also the fact that it leaves you in peace, [...] we want to do things ourselves." (Christoph Munier)

### 5.3.2 Support systems, institutions and fashion-related events in the city of Berlin

The creative industry is associated with a supportive infrastructure comprising various institutions and services. This network proves to be significantly relevant for the majority of respondents. Among the fashion entrepreneurs, a key determinant in choosing a location is the presence of favorable circumstances that facilitate both spontaneous and deliberate interactions in event settings, as well as networking opportunities with people from the creative and cultural industries. These factors play a vital role in shaping the entrepreneurs' identities and cultivating a positive reputation within the urban setting (Heebels & van Aalst, 2010). Upon asking which brand channels Esra Ünlütürk utilizes to communicate the values of their brand, she responded:

“We first primarily focus on offline business. [...] we're building up that community and growing genuinely. [...] as for example, we have right now, the upcoming event, the workshops in cooperation with Soho House, where we have a hands-on workshops where we are teaching young creatives, how to save their garments, in the sense of sustainability.”

The Soho House is a global chain of private members' clubs and hotels known for their exclusive amenities, creative spaces, and vibrant social atmosphere with locations in major cities, including Berlin.

Furthermore, Finn Dudek actively leverages Soho House as a venue for meetings with potential collaborators or clients, demonstrating its significance as a hub for networking and professional interactions.

“[...] my routine is mostly like arranging meetings with international people at Solo House [...] and that's definitely a hub. Like, holds an astonishing number of creatives and connections. [...] creates some kind of luxurious idea around the whole creative thing, which might also work against the edginess of Berlin, but I think that's also two worlds that are trying to work together. So it's it's an interesting field for sure and just just. Place to meet a lot of different creatives, and for me it's more of the utility. Just a place where I can go into the city.”

Berlin as a multicultural capital offers an ideal framework for internationally renowned trade fairs and platforms that promote the growth of the fashion industry within the city. One such example is the bi-annual Berlin Fashion Week which encompasses trade fairs and fashion shows, providing opportunities for designers, brands, buyers, and media representatives to showcase their work and establish valuable connections.

The Berlin Senate has played a proactive role in supporting the local fashion industry. These initiatives encompass financial support for fashion platforms, the organization of fashion shows, collaborations with various fashion fairs, the hosting of local fashion awards, and



investments in promotional and communication activities. Such measures aim to enhance visibility, create networking opportunities, and foster the overall development of the fashion sector in Berlin (<https://fashionweek.berlin/>).

Nevertheless, the perceptions surrounding the Berlin Fashion Week tend to be predominantly negative in nature. Yasin Müjdeci, for example, rather goes to the Paris Fashion Week rather than Berlin Fashion Week with his buying team. Moreover, he points out the lack of connections of relevant people from the fashion industry in Berlin.

“I was last time on a fashion week in Berlin seven, eight years ago. Not anymore because I, I don't have anything there. I mean, it's just not really updated. And not relevant, not interesting, not really nice selection. I'm, I'm zero fan of Berlin Fashion Week anyway. I mean, if you are really working in the fashion industry, seriously, you don't have this time for Berlin because [...] it's at same time with Paris Fashion Week at the same time. [...] This is the, the biggest and the most important fashion week because, you know, it's not just sitting in front row and checking shows. It's more than this. You are doing your buying. This is a networking place for this industry and everything. And in Berlin, there are no international, no international guests or brands or visitors coming here because it's not relevant. [...]”

Kai Gerhardt recalls the previous state and future prospects of the Berlin Fashion Week in the following way:

“[...] approximately three years ago, the Fashion Week moved to Frankfurt. Now it is making a partial comeback. Before the move to Frankfurt, there used to be a major show regularly held at the tent, which no longer exists because it attracted people who were not part of the creative scene. Only those who could afford to showcase their work at the tent were present. There was a lack of networking opportunities. However, there is a glimmer of hope as efforts have been made in the past two years to revive and strengthen the fashion scene. [...] In the past, there used to be a rule during Fashion Week that all three fashion schools would take turns showcasing their collections in the tent. Since we have an annual fashion show where all projects and final works are presented, we usually organize it ourselves. The shows in the tent eventually ceased to exist. Instead, there were self-organized fashion shows that were open to the public, press, and family members, and they were quite large. However, they became less frequent during the pandemic. But I assume that they are planning to reintroduce it this year, and as for collaboration with other people, I have to admit that during my time, there were no offers for that. They are now trying to move more in that direction. For example, they have already done something with the Voo Store. It was a project focused on upcycling, and the resulting projects were exhibited and available for purchase at the Voo Store. Such projects are now happening more frequently, aiming to strengthen the external connections.”

Furthermore, various perspectives regarding the Berlin Fashion Week and perception of Berlin as a fashion capital have been expressed in following ways:

"Perhaps it has become a bit more bourgeois in a way, and when shopping around the Hackescher Markt, you can already sense that it's Fashion Week and that customers come from everywhere.

However, in Berlin, it's not as much of a magnet anymore. [...] It used to be different in the past. When Fashion Week was in Berlin, the city was filled with people who were clearly engaged with fashion. Nowadays, every day feels like a day when anyone can come in. It's because in Berlin, there are always people around who are somehow involved with fashion or how it is perceived externally. Therefore, it doesn't have such a significant economic impact on the city. Berlin has realized this in recent years, and the trade fair even went to Frankfurt for a while. There were only 2/3 seasons during the time of the pandemic, I believe.” (Christoph Munier)

“I think it's not about the fashion, like the brand that is showcasing, it's about the people, the audience, that is, [...] They're just taking pictures of themselves. [...] like, are you here for the fashion or for yourself? For your social media? [...] I also think it's not well organized. Because like you had this show. And then you could walk and like see the exhibition. But like after 10 minutes, they're like taking everyone out. I was like, OK well, so I think also the organization is not like best there. But I also can't compare it because I've been to Paris Fashion Week just for GmbH, but I've never been to other shows to have like this kind of comparison. [...] But as I told you I was not a fan of Berlin Fashion Week. They should step up the game, but at the same time I don't want them to step up the game, like, I feel like Berlin is like, so unique in its own way. I don't see Berlin becoming the new Paris, for example. The new New York, right. So I also think like Berliner wouldn't agree on that. They just want to keep it like the way it is.” (Manal Fathi)

“Fashion Week and all of this. For me is not is not useful. I mean at this in Berlin, for the things I've seen. [...] it's just people trying to look cool and to think they're cool but just pretending and it's not really a business thing, you know, it's like it's just like, oh, I'm here and I'm cool and I wear sunglasses at night and and then I have, like, these big boots and like, [...] I have not networked in one event in Fashion Week and I've been like three fashion weeks already like. [...] I don't think it's definitely a place to do network or to to get to, you know, just to show your brand and for people to take pictures of it and [...] I think this network part, I think comes in, like, maybe in like fabric fairs or things like this like the one in Paris and like you know you can go and like actually talk to people that like like how do you call this, like the people that like, sell you the fabric. So, like the people that sell you the zippers, like these things that I think this is a place in a fair where you can like go and like actually talk to these things and these actually networking and not like go in and see and like talking like making friends with like a photographer that is going to take your picture. Like I don't know, I find that a bit fake and weird.” (Diego Martinez)

The founder of Kauf Dich Glücklich briefly refers to the fashion and music fair *Bread & Butter* (since 2016: *Bread & Butter by Zalando*), which operated from 2001 to 2018 and referred to some possible benefits for fashion entrepreneurs in general.

"All the brands presented themselves in an incredibly expensive and elaborate manner. [...] However, we are not the type of people who would rent a booth at a trade fair. The concept of trade fairs, as it used to be in terms of diversity and how every city in Germany somehow exploited it, is over, and Berlin actually doesn't need it. That era has passed, and those who were already strong will continue to thrive."

In Berlin, there are organizations that work towards supporting and promoting the local fashion industry. One such organization is the *Fashion Council Germany* (<https://www.fashion-council-germany.org/>). It was founded in 2015 in Berlin and provides assistance and guidance to emerging designers from Germany. Kai Gerhardt described in his following statements the development of these institutions and services that aim to support Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs:

“The German Fashion Council, with involvement from Studio Retail, is trying to build a network and provide all designers, including established ones, with the opportunity to present themselves during Fashion Week and offer a platform. For example, Studio Retail offers every designer the option to register on their website and receive unpaid advertising during Fashion Week to promote their store with images, a homepage, and accompanying text. They advertise within that framework and naturally connect with the Fashion Council. Moreover, both organizations have a competition where designers can apply for events and receive sponsorship, providing them with the opportunity to participate in happenings and events during Fashion Week. [...] I do have an online shop, but in Berlin, there are different stores that sell various designers' products. For example, I have my clothes hanging in a small designer store in Mitte on Kleine Hamburger Straße 15. I also started selling in Platte last year, which is also a relatively new store. It is backed by an association that aims to support Berlin designers, and they organize events such as exhibitions, collections showcases, presentations, and talks on various topics. They have a fixed set of designers they always sell, but they also do pop-up events related to different themes. I participated twice with them, showcasing my items that fit the theme of the pop-up..”

Enis Efe employs various channels and events in Berlin as a means to effectively convey the values associated with his brand.

“[...] we are also participating in various events in Berlin, [...] For example, we have an upcoming event at Amano Bar in Hauptbahnhof, where we will introduce our brand while incorporating music. We are also planning something where we can showcase our clothing this year in September, indirectly related to Berlin Fashion Week, but in a smaller fashion week event.”

Can Batman has employed collaborations with various brands and creative individuals, like a collaborative flea market from clothing pieces of Archive Berlin and a fashion magazine called Title Mag as well as in-house events, as strategies to enhance the marketing strategy of his brand.

“[...] that was a flea market that we organized. We have done it twice already [...] and if, for example, we were to collaborate with Brand X, I would know it fits because our target audience goes there, so that would be a significant advantage. That should be the goal. I think some things should not be forced, you know. [...] And, uh, what we have done a lot is hosting various events here, whether it's in our own store or for releases. [...] They are brands that appeal to the creative scene, especially those involved in music and fashion.”

As discussed in the preceding paragraph, social and professional networks, as well as fashion events, and trade fairs, like Berlin Fashion Week, play a vital role in this process of the creation of symbolic and informal knowledge transfer as well as networking opportunities amongst individuals within the creative and cultural industries. Furthermore, these local events create urban buzz and attract people from the local and global fashion industry, resulting in temporary clusters where entrepreneurs are able to collaborate and cooperate with creative actors.

### 5.3.3 The importance of place in the age of digitalisation

The overarching question of the study is whether geography and place still matters for the modern fashion industry. The impact of globalisation and digital technologies in the creative and fashion industry is undeniable where social media is utilized to strengthen marketing efforts for fashion entrepreneurs. The combination of online and offline relationships is crucial for building reputation and success in the field. Additionally, aesthetic values attached to fashion are still influenced by specific regions, which specialize in certain segments of the industry based on geographic features. Social media is utilized by fashion brands to solidify these place-based associations. Designers often choose cities to practice their craft based on quality of life attributes and cultural diversity. However, clustering and agglomeration economies suggest that location choices are also influenced by the proximity to other creative industries (Brydges et al., 2021).

Upon asking about the views of the respondents regarding the continued significance of geography in relation to the fashion industry and their individual entrepreneurial activities, there were mixed reactions.

Kai Gerhardt acknowledges the influence of his surroundings on his entrepreneurial activities, emphasizing the role of location in shaping his approach. However, he also highlights the perspective of the consumer, suggesting that they may not necessarily prioritize the connection between the symbolic power of place and the product.

"I believe that personally, it will always have an influence on me where I work and where I live because my surrounding environment will always impact me. [...] If the design is convincing, people will be interested, and then there's still the question of how it is marketed, sold, and presented. In principle, I think that if the design is good, people are less concerned about where it was designed or where it comes from."

Esra Ünlütürk provides a different perspective, by stating that the significance of location and personal narratives will always remain. Furthermore, she finds that especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, local production will become more important for fashion entrepreneurs despite globalisation processes in the supply chain to build trust and long-lasting relationships.

For fashion entrepreneurs who depend on in-person visits from clients to their ateliers, studios, and showrooms (Johannes Boehl Cronau, Diego Martinez), the physical presence of their brand seems to be important. Cronau comments on the importance of place for the fashion industry in the following way:

“I just think there is an importance of a physical place for brand that definitely. And also because that's what I try to achieve with the studio. [...] So, I think there is importance in terms of like being physically present and creating presence with the brand and that presence somehow also has a very clear identity for me, [...] maybe there is something that we can get in touch with the audience globally through events, pop-ups etc. But I also do think for me personally place is incredibly important and a very also the private life of the brand. [...] And I don't think I would have had that exposure in other cities as much as I would have I'm having here.”

Martinez provides following statement about the significance of place:

“Hundred percent, yes, definitely. I mean, even though everything is like on the phone nowadays or whatever. I mean, I do think that like, of course this the phone, Instagram, all of this has like led to businesses being able to reach more [...] but still the place where your base says who you are as a brand, you know. It's like at the end of the day is a place where you as a designer, [...] Like that does affect the way people design the way you see things because it's the way it's the place where you live in. [...] Also, you know, it's a branding strategy.”

Since the cultural diversity and intangible aspects of the city reflect the values of Enis Efe's brand, the concept of place is important, as he stated after being asked if location matters for the fashion industry:

“For the fashion industry, yes, because, for example, we shoot videos and everything in Berlin, and you can showcase a lot here because of the diverse cultures present in the city. [...] You can simply show a lot, so if you want to capture a bit of Turkish culture, you can film in Kreuzberg; if you want to showcase Arab culture, you can go to Neukoelln.”

## 5.4 Discussion

In order to understand why fashion entrepreneurs pick Berlin as their location, how creative clusters form and why they tend to cluster in specific districts in the city, the prior chapter examined the place-specific factors using a qualitative study and semi-structured interviews. On the basis of the theoretical framework, the following part tries to summarize the key findings from the qualitative research.

In conclusion, the results confirm the theories that call for the clustering of the creative and cultural industries to varied degrees. To be more precise, these results suggest the confirmation of the theories discussed in chapter 3.2 within urbanization economics, localization economics, and the urban amenities theory.

On another note, the research's findings indicate that the theory by Wenting (2008) on the spatial formation of the fashion industry has only a limited amount of applicability in the context of Berlin. Despite being known for its many creative industries, Berlin's fashion industry is somewhat underrepresented in comparison to other major fashion cities.

The reasons why fashion entrepreneurs choose to locate and cluster in Berlin can be attributed to factors that align with the creative class theory proposed by Florida (2002) since the respondents emphasized the presence of a creative and open-minded environment which makes the city attractive for creative entrepreneurs in their view. Additionally, Berlin's accessibility, affordability, feelings of freedom, and cultural diversity were important elements that attract and retain fashion entrepreneurs as well as enhance the city's liveability to those who were either locals, moved for personal or professional reasons, or arrived to pursue further education. The interviewees repeatedly emphasized how Berlin's multicultural, artistic, and open atmosphere complemented their own artistic and brand values and way of life.

Despite not being widely recognized as an established fashion city among the majority of respondents, Berlin still holds significance as an international, creative hub for them. This is primarily attributed to its appeal as a city where individuals can initiate their entrepreneurial projects with relatively low financial capital, lower barriers of entry and the freedom of creative expression, especially in comparison to other cosmopolitan cities with higher living costs. This aligns with Porter's (2000) notion that clusters are characterized by lower barriers to entry and exit for firms and entrepreneurs as well as the co-existence of both competition and cooperation between competing firms. Furthermore, the perception of Berlin as a favorable destination for entrepreneurial activities persists despite the absence (or lack of

information) of certain supportive structures for fashion entrepreneurs, institutions, and organized fashion events.

Another important aspect to consider are the benefits that fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin enjoy by being part of creative clusters. The research findings affirm that Berlin has a significant concentration of creative and cultural industry firms and individuals in districts such as Mitte, Prenzlauer Berg, Kreuzberg, and Neukoelln. This clustering provides beneficial networking opportunities and fosters individualized creativity through the presence of a vibrant creative milieu and local buzz, as Drake (2003) suggested. Events that facilitate networking and socializing, such as those held at Soho House in Berlin, hold great value for these entrepreneurs. Consequently, it attracts even more entrepreneurs from the creative sectors to the city.

Moreover, the findings provide evidence that the key components of an entrepreneurial ecosystem as outlined by Isenberg (2011), such as access to skilled labor, suppliers, manufacturers, creative workers, and a local consumer base, play a significant role in driving cluster development and ultimately retain its participants. These results are in line with Porter's (2000) theory of industrial clustering, which asserts that local clusters are made up of interconnected companies, networks, and people and therefore contribute to competitive advantage for those localized in clusters. Additionally, they correspond with the findings of Wenting et al. (2011), who explored the location choices and economic success of fashion design entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the results align with the research conducted by Sternberg and Litzenberger (2004), which demonstrates that clusters stimulate entrepreneurial activities.

The study further validated that fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin benefit from the close proximity to fellow entrepreneurs operating in the same or different creative fields, such as music. This proximity facilitates the establishment of relevant contacts for potential partnerships and collaborations. These findings indicate that creative entrepreneurs tend to thrive in collective settings (Scott, 2006) and are drawn to locations with pre-existing creative scenes that offer networking opportunities (Lange, 2011).

Furthermore, the study also confirmed the core-periphery model introduced by Krugman (1991), as clusters in Berlin are predominantly located in the central areas of the city. This concentration of clusters acts as a driving force, attracting individuals from the periphery to migrate into the city in order to avail themselves of the benefits associated with these clusters.

Additionally, the results have shown that the respondents get inspiration and creativity

from the location-specific associations, as well as the urban and visual environment which was suggested by Drake (2003). Furthermore, some entrepreneurs expressed a positive feeling in being based in Berlin, recognizing the place-specific reputation, narratives, and associations that the city holds. To showcase this narrative in their work, one respondent prominently incorporates Berlin into their branding and marketing efforts, while others subtly reference the city of Berlin. Nonetheless, it appears that all entrepreneurs, to some extent, integrate their personal and professional connection with the city into their products and branding efforts.

Moreover, the notion of creative placemaking and placebranding, as proposed by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), suggests that locations can develop strong identities through the interplay of history, clustering, and specialized industries (Zitcer, 2020). Although Berlin may not have a long-standing fashion history, this study cautiously suggests that the presence of dedicated fashion entrepreneurs can contribute to the establishment of Berlin's identity as a global fashion city in the future.

Finally, in any contemporary research about fashion, the discourse about sustainability should not be overlooked as the fashion and textile industry is recognized as one of the most environmentally damaging and polluting sectors worldwide (Buchel et al., 2022). As a result, consumers are developing a growing awareness and consciousness regarding sustainability and circular fashion which consequently leads to a growing number of fashion entrepreneurs embracing sustainable practices over the recent years (Heinze, 2020). However, during the interviews, the topic of the role of Berlin in fostering sustainable fashion appeared to play a relatively minor role. Still, through the conversations, some sustainable practices could be demonstrated. These actions entail, for example, sourcing deadstock fabrics (Kai Gerhardt) or second-hand clothing pieces (Manal Fathi) for commercial collections. Additionally, there are those who have actively contributed to the promotion of pre-owned fashion consumption by owning vintage and second-hand stores (Zuzanna Guhs and Can Batman). Furthermore, the future of supply chains and local production was addressed by respondent Esra Ünlütürk through the establishment of her tailor studio. In my interviews, the tailoring sector and local production emerged as a promising niche but overall the topic of sustainability and whether Berlin boasts sustainable fashion practices for entrepreneurs lacks sufficient data.



## 6 CONCLUSION

The objective of this research is to enhance existing concepts and theories concerning the development of creative clusters and creative placemaking from the unique perspectives of creative entrepreneurs by understanding how they utilize the concept of place to navigate and enhance their entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, this research should give insights about clustering in emerging fashion clusters outside of the *Big Four* global fashion cities. The following chapter provides an answer to the main research question, explaining why the specific research method has been used, and lastly providing limitations, further avenues of research, and recommendations.

Firstly, despite possessing the title of *City of Design*, Berlin has not been identified as an established fashion city by the majority of respondents. This viewpoint among respondents suggests that Berlin does not possess a fashion-centric identity. Instead, the city is widely perceived as a vibrant hub, accommodating numerous creative and cultural industries. Thus, living in close proximity to firms from the CCIs leads to opportunities to network and socialize for the respondents. Additionally, the results confirmed that Berlin is viewed as an open-minded, affordable and culturally diverse city which makes it an attractive place to live and work for creative entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, the research investigated whether the concept of place can act as a catalyst for inspiration and creativity within the context of Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs. Specifically, it was examined whether the influence of the visual environment, reputation, narrative, and creative atmosphere associated with the particular location were used in branding and marketing strategies, and whether these factors contribute to the locational behavior of fashion entrepreneurs. Although, the results have shown that the symbolic value of place has not significantly been proven to influence the choice of location for fashion entrepreneurs, there were instances where they interacted with place through connections, narratives, and symbols that were exclusive to Berlin. Thus, these city narratives and symbols were used in branding and marketing efforts by some respondents.

One of the factors that contribute to the recognition of Berlin as a creative city is its designation as a *City of Design* by the UNESCO Creative Cities Network as aforementioned. This prestigious title acknowledges Berlin's significant contributions to the field of design and further enhances its reputation as a hub for creative industries. Unlike in Amsterdam, which has established itself as a recognized player in the denim fashion business, with the denim

cluster being mostly explained by Wenting's (2008) theory of spinoff dynamics (Vliet, 2018), Berlin's fashion industry lacks a similar level of specialization and recognition. Nevertheless, Berlin's reputation as a design city, along with its overall casual fashion identity, presents an opportunity for future research to delve into the influence of place on the spatial formation of emerging fashion clusters. By examining the role of location in shaping these clusters, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and factors that contribute to their formation.

In order to explain the phenomenon of clustering in the creative and cultural industries, a qualitative research approach employing semi-structured interviews was adopted. This method was deemed most suitable for the research objective, which aimed to explore and comprehend the clustering and locational behavior of creative entrepreneurs by capturing their unique and individual perspectives. It is important to note that the study's intention was not to generate generalizations applicable to all Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs or those in other emerging fashion cities. Rather, the focus was on gaining in-depth insights and understanding of the specific context under investigation in form of a case study.

According to Vliet's (2018) research on the spatial formation of the Dutch denim fashion cluster, several recommendations emerge that are also applicable to the fashion entrepreneurship ecosystem in Berlin. First and foremost, in order to grow a self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystem and establish a strong presence in the global fashion industry, it is essential to create an appealing and sustainable environment that supports the livelihoods of Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs. Given the significant role of the fashion industry within the new creative economy framework and the impact of entrepreneurs on fostering creative placemaking, it is crucial to prioritize fashion entrepreneurship and integrate it into policymaking as a central cultural pillar.

One approach to support fashion entrepreneurs is to facilitate easier access to financial resources and funds, as many fashion entrepreneurs in Berlin still heavily rely on personal savings or support from family and friends. Additionally, it is important for the local government and Berlin Senate to raise awareness about existing support structures, such as the German Fashion Council or the Association of German Fashion Designers. Additionally, according to a respondent's statement, customers in Berlin are less likely to pay the costs for high-quality fashion products, preferring cheaper and lower-quality alternatives. In response, a possible solution could involve recognizing fashion as a cultural heritage and lowering the value-added tax specifically for fashion items to a rate of 7%. Furthermore, addressing the

pressing issue of housing and presence of affordable and centrally located spaces, it is recommended to regulate rents and provide subsidies through public grants. This financial support enables entrepreneurs to contribute to the city's unique fashion identity and stimulate the local economy (McRobbie, 2013). In doing so, fashion entrepreneurs can focus in creating products that drive the city's economic development, foster the growth of the local fashion industry, and cultivate a distinct fashion identity for the city (McRobbie, 2013).

Furthermore, since fashion weeks act as temporary clusters by uniting local and global fashion industry within a specific geographic location (Brydges et al., 2021), it is important to reconsider the approach of the Berlin Fashion Week by shifting towards a more commercially-oriented event rather than solely focusing on presenting niche designers. This strategic shift will attract international brands and entrepreneurs, as fashion-related events and trade fairs play a significant role in driving business and networking opportunities for them. By broadening the scope and appeal of the event, Berlin can position itself as an attractive destination for the local and global fashion industry.

As a closing recommendation, it is proposed that the prestigious University of the Arts in Berlin should foster networking opportunities for fashion design students within the course curriculum. This can be achieved by connecting the students with important stakeholders of the local fashion industry, providing career fairs, cooperating with local producers and manufacturers, and providing fashion graduates with the necessary tools and business management skills to establish their own fashion entrepreneurial ventures. Additionally, with the increasing significance of sustainability and circular fashion among fashion entrepreneurs and consumers, it is proposed to launch additional educational initiatives that concentrate on sustainable fashion. This could ultimately establish sustainability as a core pillar of the fashion industry in Berlin.

In conclusion, it is necessary to acknowledge that describing the inherent factors that contribute to the clustering of the creative and cultural industries in a city is a challenging task, as it involves understanding which place-specific factors act as magnets for creative entrepreneurs. It is highly likely that Berlin's preexisting reputation as a city hosting a wide range of creative and cultural industries, its historical significance, and the collapse of the Berlin Wall resulting in ongoing transformations of neighbourhoods that were near it, namely Mitte, Prenzlauerberg, Kreuzberg, and Neukoelln, all play a significant role in the attraction of fashion entrepreneurs since the beginning of the 2000s. As the capital of Germany, Berlin gains a lot of attention, drawing creative individuals from around the world and other German

cities. Creative entrepreneurs exert a considerable influence on placemaking strategies, although top-down approaches, like gentrification processes, also lead to changes in the spatial formation of the creative industries. For instance, the Prenzlauer Berg neighbourhood in Berlin, previously a residential area inhabited by the youthful punk subculture of the 1990s and 2000s, has now developed into a more settled district, accommodating a diverse mix of middle-to high-income families, internationals, and creative professionals. Consequently, the rising housing costs prompted creatives to migrate to the Kreuzberg and Neukoelln neighbourhoods, which presently possesses arguably the highest concentration of creative individuals within Berlin. This conclusion derived from the unique perspectives of Berlin-based fashion entrepreneurs can arguably answer the main research question.

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## 8 APPENDICES

### **Appendix A. Interview request template for respondents (English version)**

Dear [insert name],

My name is Alin and I am writing my Master's thesis in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. My research is focused on understanding why entrepreneurs in the fashion industry choose Berlin as their location, and how this leads to the formation of creative clusters in specific neighbourhoods.

For my research, it would be ideal to include your name or brand name. Would you be interested in a 45- to 60-minute interview, preferably within the next few weeks? I believe your perspective would be very valuable.

I hope that you have time to participate. We will surely find a suitable time within the next few weeks. If you wish, I can gladly share the general findings with you.

Best regards,

Alin

## **Appendix B. Interview request template for respondents (German version)**

Liebe/r [insert name],

ich bin Alin und schreibe meine Masterarbeit an der Erasmus Universität Rotterdam im Studiengang Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship. Ich erforsche, warum Berlin ein attraktiver Standort für Modeentrepreneure ist und warum sie sich in bestimmten Bezirken konzentrieren.

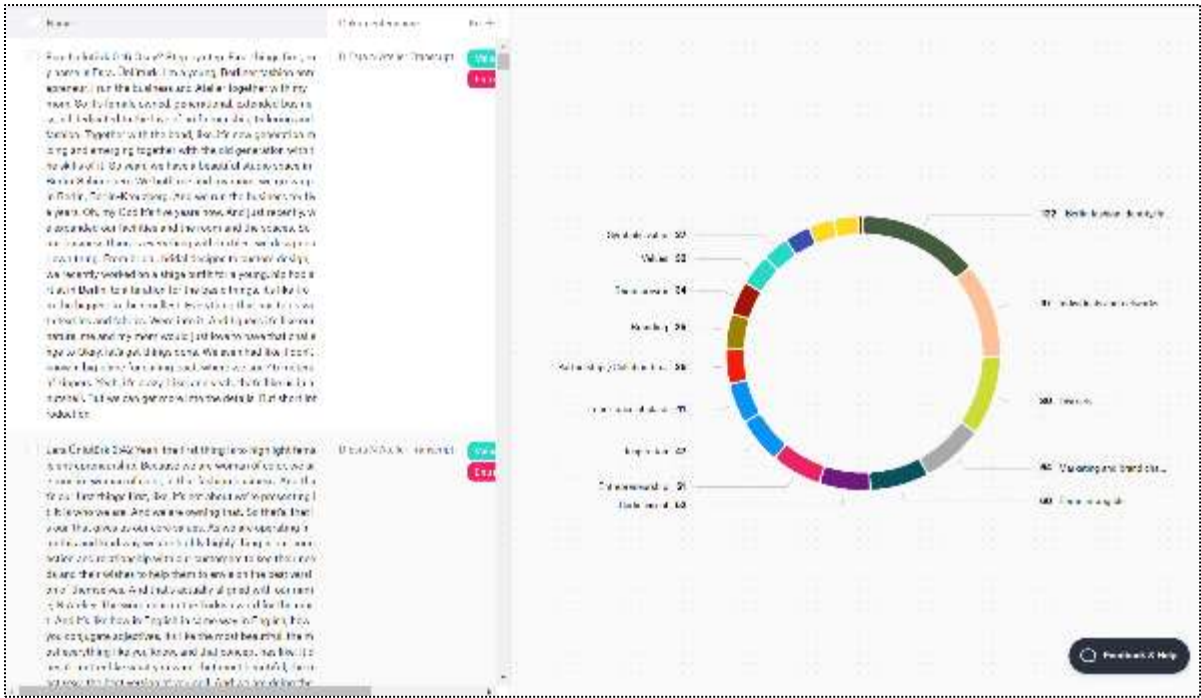
Für meine Forschung wäre es optimal, wenn ich auch Deinen Namen bzw. Brandnamen mit einbeziehen könnte. Hättest Du Lust auf ein 45- bis 60-minütiges Interview, am besten so schnell wie möglich? Ich fände Deine Perspektive unglaublich wertvoll.

Ich hoffe, dass Du Zeit hast, dabei zu sein. Wir finden bestimmt einen passenden Termin. Wenn Du möchtest, teile ich Dir natürlich gerne die allgemeinen Ergebnisse mit.

Viele Grüße,

Alin

### Appendix C. Excerpt of citation manager’s user interface in Atlas.ti software



**Appendix D. Excerpt of code manager’s user interface in Atlas.ti software**

