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Title

Breaking Through: The Role of Amsterdam Fashion Week in Shaping the Careers of Emerging Designers

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Abstract

Amsterdam Fashion Week is a fashion event hosted in the Dutch capital each year. Its core purpose is to position Amsterdam as a fashion city and hence a power in the global industry alongside fashion capitals such as Paris and Milan. Reflecting Amsterdam's unique culture of being a 'hub' for companies that strive to promote creativity, sustainable development, and innovation, a core value advocated by AFW is that of platforming young and emerging designers, serving as a stepping stone for their career. This thesis investigates the role of AFW in shaping these designers' careers, exploring how their participation in the event influences their professional opportunities and trajectories. Specifically, the study aims to answer the research question: *How does Amsterdam Fashion Week shape and influence emerging fashion designers' careers?* Through a qualitative research methodology centering on semi-structured interviews with designers who have taken part in AFW, this thesis aims to analyze some of the experiences, challenges, and professional outcomes that arise for these designers as a result of participating in the event. The findings reveal that AFW participation often serves as a platform for visibility and exposure, a valuable learning experience, and an important opportunity for industry networking and entry into the professional field. However, the impact of AFW is highly contingent on individual trajectories, with many designers using the experience to reassess their alignment with the broader fashion system. These varied responses are encapsulated in the proposed typology of career trajectories: Stop, Slow, and Straddle — referring respectively to designers exiting fashion, embracing slow fashion, or navigating its commercial and creative tensions simultaneously. Specifically, this thesis aims to examine the relative effectiveness of fashion weeks as career accelerators for emerging fashion talent. More generally, however, this research strives to highlight the current role of intermediaries and temporary clusters in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), exploring their relevance and impact on creatives in today's digital age.

Keywords

Fashion week, designer careers, intermediaries, creative cities, creative clusters

Word count: 14,199

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1. Introduction

Fashion weeks have long served as central nodes in the global fashion system, serving as temporary physical clusters where cultural expression, economic activity, and creativity intersect. These events act as critical intermediaries within the fashion ecosystem, mediating relationships between designers, press and media, and consumers. Indeed, fashion weeks not only shape national and transnational fashion trends, but also act as important platforms for launching and sustaining designer careers, in part due to their character as spatially and temporally bounded events that bring together key industry players (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006, p. 736). Traditionally dominated by the fashion weeks of the "Big Four" cities — Paris, Milan, London, and New York — this category of events has amassed symbolic capital and market power, a phenomenon which appears to be further reinforcing the aforementioned fashion capitals' positions as gatekeepers of the fashion industry (Zhang et al., 2022, p. 73; Wubs et al., 2020, p. 322).

In recent years, however, so-called "second-tier" fashion cities, such as Amsterdam or Berlin, have attracted an increasing amount of attention as they seek to carve out distinctive positions for themselves within the global fashion map (Zhang et al., 2022, pp. 73–74). These cities thus represent important sites and opportunities for studying how the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) develop beyond traditional, established hubs, highlighting processes of market decentralization, cluster formation, and alternative modes of production and distribution (Wubs et al., 2020, p. 319; Keane, 2011, pp. 152–161).

This thesis focuses specifically on Amsterdam and its respective fashion week, which was relaunched in 2004 in its current format as part of a strategic effort to establish and subsequently solidify Amsterdam as a fashion city. Amsterdam Fashion Week (AFW) typically takes place in August or September of each year, both physically in various locations around the Dutch city of Amsterdam, and virtually through the organization's website (Kraaijeveld, 2012). Though it lacks the historical prestige and industry dominance of the Big Four, AFW has evolved into a platform that showcases and supports a diverse array of fashion designers, in particular emerging talents and those committed to sustainable practices. Indeed, under the creative direction of Danie Bles, AFW's current director since 2018, the fashion week has refocused its mission toward showcasing conceptual, responsible, and locally rooted examples of fashion design, often serving as a

springboard for early-career designers (Koning, 2024). Notably, since 2018, AFW takes place annually — rather than biannually, as is standard for the fashion weeks of major fashion capitals like the Big Four — a shift justified by its organizers on one hand as a means to prioritize the quality of programming, and on the other, to promote environmental sustainability over frequency and commercial scale (Bles, cited in Koning, 2024). As such, the event is relatively more focused on promoting and accelerating designers' careers, than on attracting the attention of consumers and of wider audiences; a strategy which slightly differs from the fashion weeks of other cities around the world.

This is evident through recent initiatives like The HUB by AFW in 2024, which took the form of a pop-up store that hosted a curated selection of brands excelling in sustainability, circularity, and creativity. The HUB's participants were given opportunities to forge connections as well as to partake in a talent support program which gave them the chance to potentially secure a solo show in the 2025 edition of the fashion week (AFW, 2024). This initiative is just one of the examples displaying how AFW serves as a dynamic intermediary that not only showcases fashion, but also fosters sustainability, cultural expression, and the professional growth of designers. Its inception and evolution, in the past two decades, thus reflects broader shifts in the fashion industry towards inclusivity, innovation, and environmental consciousness.

Despite the recognized importance of fashion weeks as temporal clusters and intermediaries in the field of fashion and more generally, in the CCIs (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006, p. 736), there exists a significant gap in academic research on the role of these industry events in second-tier cities specifically. Even less is known about how these events influence individual designer careers within such contexts. While some studies acknowledge the growing presence of cities like Amsterdam in the global fashion landscape, for instance as a hub for fashion design and innovation (Zhang et al., 2022, p. 73; Casadei et al., 2020, p. 13), few have closely examined how the temporal and intermediary functions of fashion weeks operate outside major capitals, or how they contribute to the career development of the creative talent situated in these areas. In the case of Amsterdam specifically, while scholars recognize AFW's role within the city's local fashion scene and the nation's, they deem its international impact to be limited up to now (Casadei et al.,

2020, p. 13). Consequently, the impact of this event on its participants at an individual scale, be it personal or professional, remains quite an underexplored topic of research.

This thesis aims to address this academic gap by investigating the role of AFW, as a temporal cluster and intermediary institution, in shaping the career trajectories of fashion designers, particularly (but not limited to) those at early stages of their professional journey. As such, the research question is as follows:

How does Amsterdam Fashion Week shape and influence emerging fashion designers' careers?

By addressing this research question, this study aims to facilitate a deeper understanding into how AFW and in general fashion weeks in second-tier cities contribute to the development of their participants' professional lives. To do so, this thesis combines theoretical insights from the literature on intermediaries and clustering in the CCIs with empirical analysis of primary data on AFW. Simultaneously, this research topic sheds light on the current-day relevance of place in fashion. Indeed, fashion cities are not merely venues for industry events such as AFW, but also serve as important places for local fashion producers to create and display their unique cultural identity, underscoring the significance of the geography, or spatial dynamics, of fashion (Zhang et al., 2022, p. 77). Hence, particular attention is devoted to consideration of how AFW's local context, and the broader backdrop and conditions of the Dutch economy, affect opportunities for visibility, recognition, and professional growth for fashion designers. In doing so, this research provides critical insights into the opportunities and constraints faced by emerging designers working outside traditional fashion capitals, and the ways in which local fashion events mediate access to local, national, and potentially global industry networks.

Situating AFW within the existing literature on creative industries and clusters, and cultural intermediaries, this thesis seeks to contribute to ongoing academic debates regarding the geography of fashion and the evolving role of industry events such as trade fairs and fashion weeks. Given the scarcity of research on this topic, it is particularly relevant to delve deeper into how second-tier fashion cities cultivate local talent and careers, and negotiate their position within a — still to this day — rather hierarchical global fashion ecosystem. Indeed, although for

now global fashion capitals like the Big Four continue to command the majority of attention and investment (Zhang et al., 2022, p. 74), it is crucial to acknowledge that countries like the Netherlands are increasingly recognized for their contributions to shaping new, hybrid narratives around fashion practice, cultural value, and sustainability (Teunissen, 2024, p. 15).

This thesis is structured into five main sections, the first of which is this introduction. Following this, the second section contains the theoretical framework which underpins this inquiry into AFW and fashion design careers. The framework aims, on one hand, to shed light on the context of the research, in terms of reviewing existing academic texts related to the core topics at hand, and on the other, to situate this paper amongst those works.

The third section delves into the methodology of this study by explaining the details of both the design and practical implementation of the research, including how data were collected and analyzed in order to address the research question. In addition to describing the steps taken, the methodology section also provides a rationale for the methodological choices made, drawing from established academic literature on qualitative research methods. As such, this section also demonstrates that the research design is both appropriate and academically robust in the context of investigating the influence of AFW on designer careers.

Following the methodology, the fourth section of this study contains the data analysis and presents the main findings derived from the primary research, namely, the interviews. The results are analyzed through a thematic analysis approach, built around the key themes that arise during the review of the literature as well as of the interviews themselves. This process also involves, in the background, coding the qualitative data with the support of the ATLAS.ti software, allowing for the identification of recurring response patterns, themes, and other insights related to the experiences of the designers participating in AFW.

Finally, the fifth section — the conclusion — brings together the key findings of this research and draws their implications, linking back to the academic literature from the theoretical framework. This closing section reflects on the extent to which an answer to the research question can be developed based on the data collected and analyzed, and also offers broader reflections and recommendations for further research on the role of fashion weeks, second-tier fashion cities, and lastly, careers and clusters in the cultural and creative industries.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this section, some of the key academic literature dealing with the topics central to this thesis is introduced and reviewed. This includes studies centered on the characteristics of cultural and creative industries; the field of fashion and in particular, industry events such as fashion shows and fashion weeks; creative careers; and finally, spatial dynamics such as cluster and network theory. The aim is to provide a strong theoretical foundation for this research paper and to situate Amsterdam Fashion Week (AFW) within broader debates in the study of fashion and cultural economics as a whole. Moreover, this framework should clarify how existing theories and authors guide both the present research process and the subsequent analysis and discussion of the research findings.

This literature review begins by introducing the relevance of intermediaries in the cultural and creative industries. Following this, theories on creative careers are presented and reviewed, emphasizing some of the opportunities and challenges faced by creative workers such as fashion designers. The theoretical framework then moves on to tracing the historical development and sociocultural significance of fashion weeks. This section then considers the role of place and geography in the fashion industry, drawing on literature that examines the cultural and economic relevance of local contexts, such as network theory and clustering theory. All of these perspectives guide the analysis of AFW's institutional role and its impact on designer career trajectories, simultaneously tying this thesis in to broader debates on intermediaries and temporary clusters in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs).

2.1 Intermediaries in the CCIs

Given that this field of study is relatively recent and actively being developed, theorizing about the CCIs is a process which often involves borrowing tools and frameworks of research or analysis from other academic disciplines. Caves (2003) uses such a multidisciplinary approach in identifying links between the creative and the commercial sides of activities in the CCIs. Indeed, he states that a large portion of creative industries — and the undertakings taking place within them — are structured according to rules resembling, to some extent, those of contract theory in economics (p. 73). In his seminal paper, Caves (2003) thus goes on to identify some key

characteristics as well as general examples of these "contracts between art and commerce," as he terms them (p. 73).

Two crucial features of exchanges in the CCIs are the 'nobody knows' and 'art for art's sake' principles; the first refers to the high level of uncertainty present on both the supply and demand side of the CCIs, while the second refers to the intrinsic motivation of artists to undertake creative pursuits (Caves, 2003, p. 74). These properties inherent to the CCIs create the need for artists and creatives to collaborate both amongst themselves as well as with what Caves (2003) calls 'humdrum inputs,' denoting factors of production, including labor, that operate according to standard economic logics and incentives (p. 73). As such, intermediaries are often introduced into the contracts between art and commerce to bridge the sometimes-differing motivations or objectives of the two sides. Caves (2003) provides three examples of such intermediation in this paper, namely the relationship between art gallery and artist, that between publisher and author, and thirdly, the agreement between record label and musician (pp. 75–78). In each case, while the more 'humdrum' intermediary is in theory expected to support and thus benefit the creative worker, they also have the potential to take advantage of the latter's creative inclinations (such as prioritizing *art for art's sake* over profit-making), especially in the presence of moral hazard or other principal-agent problems. This highlights the importance of alignment in terms of objectives and motivations, both intrinsic and external, between cultural intermediaries and the creative parties they are representing or mediating between. In the absence of such alignment or symbiosis, so to say, Caves' (2003) notion of contracts between art and commerce risks devolving into a *tension* between art and commerce instead, potentially hindering the trust and reciprocity that are essential for productive collaboration in the CCIs.

Intermediaries are as crucial in the field of fashion design as in the creative sectors that Caves (2003) touches upon, namely those of visual arts, book publishing, and music distribution. Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay, known for her extensive research on the cultural industries and on creative labor markets, and Yagoubi (2014) examine the role of intermediary organizations in the context of the fashion cluster in Montreal, in particular from the perspective of providing support to designers. Through a qualitative research process consisting of open-ended interviews with designers on one hand, and intermediary and government organizations on the other, Tremblay

and Yagoubi (2014) reveal that intermediaries indeed play a very key role in promoting the development of creative careers, such as designer careers. This role is especially manifest in the case of young or early-career designers, who generally require more support with reducing risk, uncertainty, and isolation than some of the other designers interviewed have reported (Tremblay & Yagoubi, 2014, pp. 204–205). However, the authors also conclude that some of the sampled designers are not sufficiently aware of the existence of intermediaries or support networks, for example SAJE and the Lab Créatif in Montreal, and therefore are unable to benefit from the assistance or services that these parties could offer them (Tremblay & Yagoubi, 2014, p. 204). Hence, their paper elucidates that it is not sufficient for intermediaries to merely be present in the CCIs, as Caves (2003, p. 73) has preliminarily revealed, but that these organizations — or potentially the relevant governments and policy-makers — must also furnish efforts to spread awareness of the existence and activities of cultural intermediaries in order to maximize the latter's reach and their effectiveness in providing knowledge sharing and career support (Tremblay & Yagoubi, 2014, p. 204).

2.2 Creative Careers: Boundaryless, Portfolio, & Entrepreneurial Careers

The topic of creative careers, or careers in the CCIs as a whole, has been studied by numerous scholars of economics (including cultural economics and labor economics) (Caves, 2003; Throsby, 2001), sociology, urban studies (Tremblay, 2012), and several other disciplines. The existence of creative careers at the intersection of these various academic and professional fields renders them a particularly complex and layered object of research, in particular given that they represent an ever-evolving concept (Tremblay, 2003, p. 81). Indeed, the advent of the 'knowledge economy' and of the digital age in many countries across the globe has transformed what it means to work within the CCIs — some of main consequences being an increased fragmentation and mobility of occupations (Tremblay, 2003, p. 81).

Drawing from the work of Cadin et al. (2000, p. 3) on boundaryless careers and what they coin originally in French, 'nomadic careers' — *carrières nomades* — Tremblay (2003, p. 86) identifies these emergent types of creative careers as a result of the recent transformations and reorganizations of business forms. For instance, she highlights the growing role of business

networks in creative and knowledge-based industries, as well as that of informal communities such as shared social spaces and communities of practice (Tremblay, 2003, pp. 86–87). The latter concept is described by Gherardi (2009, p. 515) as one that emphasizes the community, rather than the individual worker, as the entity with the agency and capacity to learn and accumulate knowledge. As such, the notion of communities of practice shifted the relative balance in existing theories of knowledge toward social rather than cognitive theories (Gherardi, 2009, pp. 514–515). Within the context of management literature, Gherardi (2009, p. 517) makes mention of Wenger's (2000, p. 229) conception of communities of practice, in particular their characteristic features of shared routines, ongoing mutual relationships, collective identity definition, and in some cases, local traditions. Wenger (2000, p. 229–230) also emphasizes the idea of communities of practice as dynamic, ever-evolving entities whose existence may not be overtly apparent, even to the individuals who make up the community itself. Going further, he puts forth three 'modes of belonging' which interact in order to create and maintain a — well-functioning, which is to say, coherent — community of practice. These are engagement, imagination, and alignment; the first referring to interaction amongst members of the community, the second to the formation of shared images and conceptualizations, and the third denoting the need for coherence between the community's various activities as well as with its local context (Gherardi, 2009, p. 517–518). These modes of belonging, as well as their role in shaping and pushing learning processes forward, share some notable commonalities with Tremblay's (2003) research on new career types.

For instance, Tremblay (2003, p. 86) identifies a growing tendency for the ways of relating and learning in the CCIs to take place away from, or outside of, the typical, cellular form of the business organization. In fact, she asserts that it is more relevant to view creative careers themselves as the determinants of (new) organizational forms, rather than the organizations dictating career types, as has traditionally been the case in most areas of economic activity (Tremblay, 2003, p. 86). Like Wenger (2000), Tremblay (2003) also mentions the crucial role that learning plays in careers in the CCIs and that especially in the boundaryless or nomadic careers approach, it can be strongly aided by collaboration between people. She refers to this process as 'cross-pollination,' given that it involves a dynamic exchange and transmission of ideas and know-how from person to person (Tremblay, 2003, p. 87). As such, though skills and knowledge are

extremely important at the individual level for a professional with a nomadic career trajectory, they are also influenced by the networks that the individual is part of or interacts with.

Cadin et al. (2000, p. 5) highlight this multidimensional approach to career development through their presentation of the three core competencies that the economics of knowledge center on, namely 'knowing how,' 'knowing whom,' and 'knowing why.' In their framework, knowing *how* denotes a worker's knowledge, skills, and routines; knowing *whom* refers to the relevant relationships, networks, and contacts that they have access to; and lastly, knowing *why* consists of the subject's interests, passions, values, and identity (Cadin et al., 2000, p. 5; Tremblay, 2003, p. 87). These competencies are key when approaching or studying nomadic careers, becoming an equivalent of the concept of human capital in economic disciplines (Tremblay, 2003, pp. 88–89). Hence, Tremblay (2003, p. 89) writes that theorists who adopt a boundaryless or nomadic careers approach often speak of a 'competency portfolio' rather than a repository of human capital. This introduces more nuance to the concept as it implies that individuals pursuing boundaryless careers have access to a range of competencies (which can be classified into the typology of knowing how, whom, and why, as previously mentioned) that they can choose from, both actively and subconsciously (Tremblay, 2003, p. 89). Additionally, these boundaryless workers can continuously add to their portfolio of competencies (which is albeit also the case with the economic concept of human capital). This notion of a competency portfolio is in strong connection with theories of portfolio careers and multiple-job holding in the CCIs.

Handy (1984) is one of the first authors to have introduced the concept of the 'portfolio career,' identifying the need for individuals to develop a set of diverse skills and activities in order to adapt to the growing pace of the modern-day professional world (Sheldrake, 2015, p. 3). This skill set acts as a portfolio that they can carry with them to fill various career roles, often involving a mix of paid and voluntary (unpaid) work activities (Sheldrake, 2015, p. 8). This can have both positive and negative implications for the individual pursuing this career path. On one hand, a portfolio career can incite workers in creative and non-creative positions alike to develop their flexibility and career mobility, and to develop a large variety of skills (Sheldrake, 2015, p. 5). Conversely, as working lives become increasingly characterized by jobs of short duration, or temporary 'gigs,' employees and portfolio career-holders run the risk of experiencing a higher

level of job insecurity, lower average wages, and few opportunities for professional advancement (Sheldrake, 2015, p. 8). This highlights some of the ambivalent implications of multiple-job holding, suggesting that it is a career mode which may not necessarily be suited to all fields or all individuals.

In the CCIs, however, the existence of careers comprising multiple jobs simultaneously is a widespread phenomenon, as put forward by Throsby (2001) in his book *Economics and Culture*. He explains that many creatives complement their artistic pursuits with "non-arts jobs" that provide opportunities for earning income that can then be directed toward supporting their primary occupation (Throsby, 2001, p. 102). In some cases this is a necessary condition of pursuing a career in the CCIs, as the creative practice alone may not generate enough income for the artist to be financially self-sufficient (Throsby, 2001, pp. 101–102). However, Throsby (2001, p. 102) also introduces the possibility of artists taking on multiple jobs, including non-art related ones, due to those jobs presenting opportunities for more rapid revenue generation relative to creative production. As a result, holding down a non-artistic, part-time job can in fact be a means to increase the amount of time that the individual can spend pursuing their creative occupation (Throsby, 2001, p. 102). Hence, this connects well to theories of intrinsic motivation and 'art for art's sake' as driving forces behind creative careers (Caves, 2003, p. 74).

2.3 Background of Fashion Presentations: Fashion Shows & Fashion Weeks

The history of fashion weeks, as a sub-category of business events, is interlinked with that of the runway show. In her paper 'The Enchanted Spectacle,' Caroline Evans (2001) examines the history of runway shows and the crucial role that they play within the modern-day fashion industry, as well as within the cultural world in general. Evans (2001, p. 271) reveals that the inception of the fashion show dates back to the early 20th century, when they were organized either in fashion houses and stores, or to fulfill fundraising purposes for charities. As she analyzes its evolution over the subsequent decades and centuries, Evans (2001) situates the fashion show within a network of broader cultural, economic, and gender dynamics, exploring its transformation into a spectacle that intertwines commerce, art, and identity. Indeed, Evans (2001, p. 299) writes that fashion shows were reinvented in the 1960s with the advent of ready-to-wear

shows, which took on a much more theatrical form than the discreet and rather intimate haute couture runway presentations that had traditionally been held. The implication of this shift is that the fashion show became a tool aimed at marketing brands and designers, in particular through image- and reputation-building, rather than directly generating sales on the spot (Evans, 2001, p. 299).

Echoing Evans's (2001, p. 301) conception of the runway show as a spectacle, Pouillard (2015, p. 225) claims that the "history of the fashion industry is tightly linked to the spectacularization of merchandise." She, too, acknowledges the parallels between fashion presentations and the field of the performing arts (p. 226). In her chapter 'Contracts Between Fashion and the Stage (1920-1950),' Pouillard (2015, pp. 225–247) traces how fashion shows progressively adopted elements of staging, lighting, and choreography, borrowing from the tradition of theater productions. All of these emulations served the goal of enhancing the commercial appeal of fashion presentations, in particular in the context of Parisian haute couture (Pouillard, 2015, p. 233). This period from the early to mid-20th century thus marked a turning point in the broader negotiation of the boundaries between art and commerce; a process still ongoing to this day. Fashion shows inherently became live productions or, to borrow Evans's (2001, p. 301) expression, spectacles, and took on the important role of intermediaries that shape how designers and fashion houses were perceived publicly.

This historical background is relevant to this study as it frames AFW not only as a commercial event, but as a theatrical intermediary with the power to create and alter meaning for its participants and audience base. AFW's programming, encompassing a mixture of runway shows, installations, and pop-up events like The Hub, echoes the historical origin of the fashion show as studied by theorists like Evans (2001) and Pouillard (2015).

2.4 The Geography of Fashion: Fashion Cities & Clusters

In their paper, 'Decentralizing the Power of Fashion?' Zhang et al. (2022) explore and analyze the geographical patterns, cultural presentations, and inter-place connections of fashion cities by examining fashion weeks. Importantly, they uncover the unbalanced and shifting power structures of contemporary fashion cities, indicating a restructuring of the global fashion industry.

Their research also reveals the complex interactions between local, national, and international cultures in the making of fashion cities. Thus, their findings share some commonalities with Wubs et al. (2020) who suggest the need nowadays for a polycentric understanding of the global fashion system. These authors emphasize that fashion cities should not be understood as fixed entities but rather as complex and "fluid" sites of intersection between various symbolic and material forms of production (Wubs et al., 2020, p. 322). This perspective foregrounds the importance of temporary clusters, a topic studied by Keane (2011), who develops a nuanced understanding of creative clusters and their pivotal role in driving innovation. Basing his argument on theories of industrial agglomeration and applying them to the creative industries, Keane (2011) argues that clusters are characterized not only by the physical proximity of firms or organizational structures, but that they represent dynamic ecosystems where firms, institutions, and individuals co-evolve through regular and informal interactions. This framework is directly relevant to understanding Amsterdam Fashion Week, which functions as a temporal concentration of local fashion actors, facilitating both formal networking and the informal circulation of ideas, thereby supporting the ongoing development and resilience of emerging designer careers within a second-tier fashion city.

3. Methodology

While the previous section provided a review of the existing literature and theory regarding the core topics of this paper, this section seeks to describe and justify the choice of research method for this study. This includes details regarding the unit of analysis that this thesis focused on and how it has been sampled, the methods chosen for the collection and analysis of both secondary and primary data, and finally, an overview of the validity and reliability of the methods and results of this research.

3.1 Research Design

The research method used for this thesis is of a qualitative and exploratory nature as it aims to provide a detailed understanding of the role of AFW participation in the careers of emerging fashion designers. As such, it is crucial to explore the experiences and perceptions of designers who have indeed taken part in the event in the past, while leaving the space for other, related considerations to arise, for instance regarding the designers' education or even potential changes in career paths. Therefore, the research question for this thesis paper is the following: *How does Amsterdam Fashion Week shape and influence emerging fashion designers' careers?* Beyond this central question, this research is also designed with the goal of exploring the more general topic of whether — and to what extent — intermediaries and spatial clusters are still relevant in the CCIs, even in today's digital age.

The qualitative approach allows for a more open investigation into the central topics of AFW, designer careers, and intermediaries in the CCIs given that, as Bryman (2012) indicates, this type of research strategy focuses heavily on the nuances of how individuals interpret their social reality (p. 36). The qualitative research method also follows an inductive process of reasoning from the collection of data to its analysis, given that specific data will be analyzed in order to draw more generalizable conclusions and theories. Bryman (2012) describes this process as theory being the 'outcome' of the research rather than its point of departure (p. 26).

However, it is worth noting that the previous section of this thesis can be considered an element of the deductive approach, given that the aim of the literature review is to ground this research in pre-existing cultural economics theory and the body of academic literature. As such,

in a manner parallel to the deductive approach, the theories in the aforementioned literature review section provide the general basis for this research paper's specific topic of inquiry.

3.2 Unit of Analysis and Sampling

Given that fashion designers are the subject of the research question for this thesis, the unit of analysis for this study precisely concerns individual designers who have participated in at least one iteration (but potentially subsequent ones as well) of AFW. The sample includes both designers who have only shown their work at AFW once, and some who have returned to the event additional times. It is relevant to include both first-time and repeat participants given that both situations create the potential for the event to have an impact on the designer's professional life. This choice of unit of analysis also allows for a more nuanced understanding of how AFW influences designers' professional trajectories at different stages of engagement. This variation is critical, as the perceived value and impact of participation in AFW may differ depending on the designer's experience level, exposure, or goals. Individual fashion designers were chosen as the unit of analysis because the research question and objectives deal with personal experiences, perceptions, and career development; elements that are best understood through direct engagement with the designers themselves.

Bryman (2012) notes that purposive sampling is the dominant method of sampling in qualitative research. He describes this technique as the process of selecting units to be analyzed directly based on the question or questions guiding the research (p. 416). This is the case in this thesis, given that the research question already indicates the target group of designers who have participated in AFW as the focus and subjects of this research. The use of purposive sampling means that the participants included in the sample of analysis are especially knowledgeable or experienced in relation to the research question, in this case in relation to AFW, which increases the relevance and suitability of this choice of method. Although the primary selection criterion of participation in AFW is an indication of *a priori* purposive sampling in the sense that it is a criterion that has been established from the outset of the research process, a contingent sampling approach is also applied in the methodology of this study (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). This is due to the fact that the sampling criteria evolved during the research progress itself, both in the phase

of establishing contact with the participants of the sample, and during the data collection phase as well. The need for this contingent approach to sampling, and the relative methodological flexibility that comes with it, has chiefly been due to the low response rate obtained from the group of AFW participants contacted, owing to the presence of both non-response and some refusals. The main consequence of the application of contingent purposive sampling in this research is that a pair of units of the sample represent exceptions to the primary selection rule of AFW participation.

Table 1 below shows an overview of the sample, and thus makes it clear that two of the ten participants have not participated in AFW. The first of these exceptions is a fashion designer who has recently attended other two other fashion weeks in Europe, those of London and Milan, and thus who can be useful in order to triangulate the data collected on AFW with insights on other similar fashion events. The second exception in the sample consists of a specialist figure in intermediation and recruitment in the Dutch fashion scene, who also has past experience in fashion design, and thus represents a valuable addition to the sample in terms of providing a highly layered perspective on the role of fashion events and intermediaries in the cultural industries. As shown in Table 1, the remaining eight participants comprised in the sample are creatives who have participated in AFW one or more times. The majority of them, six of them to be exact, have been sampled through the *a priori* and purposive selection criterion set at the beginning of the research process, with two designers being sampled using snowball sampling. This form of convenience sampling entails establishing contact with additional individuals with the help of participants who have already been sampled and reached successfully (Bryman, 2012, p. 202). In exactly this manner, two of the respondents who initially accepted to partake in this research recommended other potential participants, once again highlighting the value of contingent purposive sampling in the context of this study.

Given the purposive nature of all of the sampling techniques applied in this research process, it is worth noting that the generalizability of the findings is, to an extent, limited. This is because, as Bryman (2012) illustrates, non-probabilistic sampling methods inevitably leave room for the potential existence of sampling bias and samples that may not be representative of their respective population (p. 187). Nonetheless, Bryman asserts that data collected from a

convenience sample can be a strong 'springboard' for further research or triangulation with preexisting findings (p. 202). Moreover, this research's sample includes professionals from various fashion disciplines (e.g., womenswear, menswear, couture, sustainable fashion) and career stages (emerging, mid-career), ensuring a diverse range of insights. This approach is therefore aligned with the logic of collecting 'rich' data, where the aim is not statistical generalization but rather the complexity and contextual depth of the data (Bryman, 2012, p. 408).

Table 1: Overview of interviewee sample

Name	Label/Company Name	Year(s) of AFW participation	Fashion Education	Current Occupation(s)	Interview Length
Erik Frenken	FRENKEN (previously Avelon)	2008, 2009, 2015, 2019	KABK The Hague; CSM, London	Designer	1 hour 10 minutes
Esther Mutsaers	NUTT Amsterdam	2024	AMFI (costume design), Amsterdam	Designer; creative concepting teacher	50 minutes
Judith van Vliet	Judith van Vliet	2012, 2015, 2016	HKU, Utrecht	Freelance fashion designer & workshop teacher	50 minutes
Lola van Praag	Lola van Praag	2014, 2020	WdKA, Rotterdam; University of Borås, Borås; University of Westminster, London	Creative textile developer	55 minutes
Maaike Van den Abbeele	MAI.ZOKU	2017 (twice)	KASK, Ghent (Belgium)	Designer; art teacher	1 hour 25 minutes

Maartje Janse	Studio M.E.N. (discontin-ued)	2017	ArtEZ, Arnhem	Impact fund manager	60 minutes
Nila ter Beek	Vanihila	N.A.	WdKA, Rotterdam	Knitwear designer	55 minutes
Saskia ter Welle	Saskia ter Welle Couture	2017	Self-taught (& took evening sewing lessons)	Designer; teacher (couture design & embroidery)	1 hour 5 minutes
Susanne Vegter	Studio Vegter	N.A.	N.A.	Fashion recruiter and mediator	55 minutes
Vivian Zandhuis	Feev the Label	2020	HKU, Utrecht	Designer; data entry associate at De Bijenkorf	55 minutes

3.3 Data Collection

The data collected and used for the purpose of this thesis is twofold; firstly, a database of AFW participants, developed and provided by Dr. M. Lavanga, was consulted in order to identify and select the potential sample of AFW fashion designers. This database includes public information about more than 100 designers who have participated in AFW between 2007 and 2024, such as their names, brands, years of participation, fashion education, and working location. As such, the data collected through this first method consists of secondary data and remains quite surface-level. For this reason, the database primarily serves as a sampling and outreach tool, helping to construct a purposive and diverse sample of research participants for the second, and more crucial, method of data collection: semi-structured, qualitative interviews. The database thus supports the broader research objective by facilitating access to relevant participants, rather than being a focal point of analysis in its own right. The second type of data collected, then, consists of the responses from these ten interviews, which aim to provide a far more exploratory

and in-depth understanding of the specific designers' experiences and perceptions. These interviews form the core of this thesis's empirical material and were selected as the most appropriate method for exploring the nuanced, personal insights that the respondents provided in relation to AFW's role in shaping their careers. By prioritizing the interview data, the aim is to center the voices of the designers and creatives themselves, allowing for a deeper investigation into how players in the CCIs experience, interpret, and make sense of their professional trajectories, in particular in the context of a second-tier or emerging fashion industry.

Given that the interviews were designed to be semi-structured, clear guiding questions were posed to the interviewees but for the most part, they remained open-ended in order to grant the respondents the liberty to structure their answers in an intuitive, personal way. This approach also allowed for the participants to steer the conversation in directions they deemed relevant, or to include anecdotes on sub-topics that may not have been foreseen by the guiding questions. In this way, each interview was — up to a certain extent — unique and personalized to each research participant. The interview guide, included in *Appendix A*, is structured around four main topics which are central to this thesis, and contains thirty guiding questions to be asked during the interviews.

The topics are (in their order of appearance in the interview guide) 'AFW & career development,' 'Amsterdam as a fashion city & the Dutch fashion industry,' 'Creative clusters and networks,' and lastly, 'Fashion careers & long-term growth.' The first topic focuses on the respondent's experience of AFW and the effects they perceive their participation in the event to have had on their professional life, thus connecting to the academic literature on both careers in the CCIs (Tremblay, 2003; Throsby, 2001; Handy, 1984) and on fashion shows as key events in the industry (Evans, 2001; Godart & Mears, 2009). The second topic explores the interviewee's views on the geography of fashion (Zhang et al., 2022), especially in the local and national context of AFW; that is, Amsterdam and the Netherlands, respectively. The third interview topic then transitions to the more social and relational aspects of fashion design work, inviting the participant to share their experiences and views on the role of creative clusters, networks, and communities—concepts developed by scholars such as Wenger (2000) and Tremblay (2012). The fourth and last topic, prior to the wrap-up and concluding remarks of the interviews, concerns

the current and future career aspirations of the designers, aiming to shed light on their motivations and values both in today's landscape, and moving forward.

The interviews themselves were carried out digitally in the period of April to June 2025, through Google Meet video calls, since the designers making up the data sample are located in various cities throughout the Netherlands (and in a minority of cases, in the Benelux region) such as Utrecht, Doesburg, Rotterdam, and Amsterdam. The respondents' answers (with one exception) were recorded using a mobile audio-recording application, and all ten were subsequently transcribed into textual documents, which were then utilized in the data analysis stage of this research. In order to align with academic standards of research ethics, each interviewee was sent an informed consent form prior to their respective interview, disclosing the aims and methods of this research and requiring their signature in order to ensure that they were expressly willing to participate in this study. As such, all participants formally accepted to partake in this research, and for their responses to be included in this thesis.

3.4 Data Analysis

In following with the qualitative nature and design of the data collection stage of this research, the data obtained during the ten semi-structured interviews also undergoes a qualitative process of analysis, primarily based on thematic coding of the transcribed responses. This has been carried out using the digital program ATLAS.ti, given that it is a leading software for the purpose of qualitative data analysis. The Microsoft Word file containing each interview transcript was imported into ATLAS.ti, whereupon each one underwent a process of iterative coding, beginning with expansive, open coding through a thorough reading of the entire length of the dialogue text. In this first step, any excerpt of the transcript which seemed interesting or valuable was assigned a code capturing its meaning, resulting in the creation of 127 distinct codes. These codes were then grouped into categories and code groups corresponding to the core topics that frequently or repeatedly arose during the interviews. The codebook containing the list of open codes and their classification into the six code groups can be found in *Appendix B*. Lastly, three main themes were induced from the coding process (open codes, categorical codes, and code groups), in combination with the relevant academic theories included in Section 2 of this

thesis. These main themes were thus an output of the process of data analysis, but also serve to structure it in Section 4, which presents and analyzes the key findings of the research process.

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Given that this paper employs qualitative research methods, the validity and reliability of its findings are understood not so much in terms of replicability or statistical generalizability, but rather in terms of credibility and trustworthiness (Flick, 2009, p. 389). To ensure the validity of this study, multiple strategies were employed to enhance the credibility of the findings and the authenticity of the interpretations.

Validity in this context refers to the degree to which the research accurately captures the experiences, perceptions, and realities of participants involved in or affected by AFW. To achieve this, data were triangulated using several sources: semi-structured interviews with fashion designers, and a secondary analysis of media coverage of AFW (for background information about the event) as well as the information from the database of AFW designers. This sort of triangulation helped to confirm patterns across data sources and reduce potential biases associated with single-method research (Denzin, 2009, p. 27). Moreover, the choice of semi-structured, individual interviews with the participants as the primary method of data collection enables a rich exploration of the respondents' personal experiences and perceptions (Bryman, 2012, p. 471), thus increasing the level of validity of the research.

In this research, reliability was addressed through detailed documentation of the research design, interview protocols, and coding procedures, as contained in this methodology section. A codebook was developed to guide the thematic analysis (see *Appendix B*), and coding was performed iteratively to refine emerging themes and reduce inconsistencies. Furthermore, transparency in how the data were collected, organized, and interpreted contributes to the dependability of the research process.

Overall, while this study does not aim for statistical generalization per se, it seeks to offer a robust and contextually grounded understanding of AFW's role in shaping designer careers. Its validity and reliability are pursued through triangulation, a robust research design, transparency in analytic methods, and ongoing reflexivity.

4. Analysis

This section presents and discusses the key insights stemming from the qualitative data collected during the ten semi-structured interviews which were conducted as part of this thesis research focused on AFW. It begins with a brief introduction of each interview participant in order to provide some of the background information and context necessary to better comprehend their unique case and perspective on AFW as well as the wider fashion ecosystem that the event is a part of. Then, the core findings of this research are revealed, structured according to the three main themes which emerged during the thematic coding and analysis process of the interview data. These themes consist of: I.) the role of Amsterdam Fashion Week in career development, II.) negotiating identity and collectivity in the fashion system, and III.) the spatial and structural conditions of creative work.

The first theme encapsulates findings relating to AFW's role in granting its participants visibility, learning experiences, and legitimacy, while also considering the limits or potential shortcomings of AFW as an industry intermediary and temporal cluster. The second theme explores the topics of fashion designers' creative identity and autonomy, their level of identification or non-identification with the industry, and emotional and social dimensions of fashion work. Lastly, the third theme focuses on the spatial and structural dynamics of Amsterdam and the Netherlands' fashion industry, such as its geographical creative clusters, funding landscape, institutional support, and growing orientation toward sustainable practices. These themes and the key interview findings that they encapsulate provide a multifaceted approach to answering this thesis's research question; *How does Amsterdam Fashion Week shape and influence emerging fashion designers' careers?* Indeed, as will be made clear in the analysis which follows, the results of this research reveal the importance of inquiring into fashion designers' experiences from a variety of dimensions. In the context of this thesis, this results in an exploration that extends to AFW but also beyond it, to consider broader dynamics of creative careers, cultural intermediaries, fashion geography, sustainability, and the tensions between art and commerce.

4.1 Introduction to the Interviewees

The first interviewee to have participated in this research is Maaike Van den Abbeele, a Dutch-Belgian multidisciplinary artist now mainly pursuing art and embroidery within the creative studio that she founded herself, MAI.ZOKU. Maaike pursued fashion studies at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (*Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten*, known as KASK) in Ghent, Belgium, and shortly after graduating, she showcased her work at AFW, presenting her master's degree collection during her debut. She participated in two separate editions of the fashion week, both taking place in 2017, as AFW was still held biannually at the time. Maaike thus recalls that "it was a very busy year because I was … trying to earn money, making a new collection, trying to show it, and trying to make something out of it." In the years since her AFW appearances, Maaike has filled a variety of professional roles, from teaching at an art school, to hosting freelance upcycling workshops and creating custom fashion orders. She can thus be considered a prime example of a creative with a diverse, portfolio career (Handy, 1984, p. 8). However, Maaike emphasizes that in recent years, her focus has for the most part shifted away from fashion design:

> Because now I feel I'm not just a designer, I'm more than that. I'm an artist that creates in different multiple forms. So for me, fashion starts to become more an extra, and something that I used to love and that I still hope to have part-time in my life. But not full-time anymore. (Maaike)

The second interviewee, Saskia ter Welle, is a designer of haute couture with a specialty in hand embroidery, particularly following the Parisian tradition of this craft. She began her fashion career in her late forties, having dedicated many years to full-time parenting responsibilities prior to that. However, her interest in fashion and garment production stems from her early childhood, as she already learned to sew aged only eight years old. This spurred the motivation for Saskia to pursue evening sewing classes during her period as a stay-at-home mother, eventually followed by traveling to Paris to learn the craft of haute couture embroidery at the École Lesage. Upon realizing that this practice was relatively absent from the Dutch fashion scene and that embroidery know-how was in demand by couture labels in the Netherlands, Saskia decided to bridge this gap by offering classes and creative workshops. However, she recalls that

at the time, although many designers responded positively to her couture embroidery work, they offered very little in terms of financial remuneration opportunities in return. Thus, she decided to establish her couture fashion label and began to design her own collections:

> And then I realized, okay, so I could also do this myself because I have everything I need to create my own collection. And that's what I did. So, I started working on my own collection first, and then when this was almost ready, I reached out to Amsterdam Fashion Week. (Saskia)

Ever since her participation in AFW in 2017, Saskia has continued to design collections from her atelier in Doesburg, while simultaneously engaging in diverse embroidery and couture teaching activities, from workshops to online classes. She is also a member of the Atelier Néerlandais, a platform initiated by the Embassy of the Netherlands in France, devoted to supporting and promoting Dutch CCI entrepreneurs, including designers, artists, and stakeholders from the publishing industry. As such, Saskia frequently works in France, including to pursue creative collaborations with other artists based there.

Maartje Janse, the third interviewee, is another AFW participant from 2017 who has since transitioned to another career path. With a background in fashion design from the ArtEZ University of the Arts in Arnhem ('ArtEZ,' hereinafter), at the age of 24 Maartje launched the fashion label Studio M.E.N. with two other designers, specifically for the purpose of showing a collection at AFW. However, due to differing visions and future aspirations, and the fashion label not providing sufficient financial stability, the three founders subsequently decided to pursue separate careers resulting in the closure of Studio M.E.N. Recognizing her managerial and coordination strengths as well as her interest both in promoting sustainability and supporting other designers, Maartje reoriented herself toward a career in consultancy and impact management. She pursued an additional degree in Cultural Economics and Entrepreneurship at Erasmus University Rotterdam in order to refine her entrepreneurial skills and considers this educational experience to have been a defining moment in her professional development:

> And it was really, yeah, a turning point for me, where I understood that I'm not per se a designer, I'm not per se an entrepreneur, but I'm more something in between. So, yeah, more the role of an intermediary, understanding the field, and guiding it and being more of a connector. (Maartje)

The next interview took place with Vivian Zandhuis, the founder and designer behind Feev the Label, who shed light on her efforts to blend creativity and circularity in her approach to fashion production. Initially a student in spatial and interior design at Cibap in Zwolle, Vivian developed an interest in fashion largely owing to her experience of interning at Scotch & Soda in London. Thus, she decided to make her graduation project fashion-related; this turned out to be her first time designing and producing her signature type of clothing which she calls 'wearable art' and which merges upcycling, painting, and sewing. Vivian then began studying fashion design at the University of Arts Utrecht (*Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht*, known as HKU) in 2020 and participated in AFW in the same year. Given the Covid-19 pandemic situation at the time, this edition of AFW was organized differently from previous years, taking the form of a talent program called 'Visions Of' (van der Wildt, 2020). Rather than preparing catwalk shows, Vivian and the other designers designed and orchestrated performances to be given by the models wearing their creations.

> . . . we had different spots in a building. And then the press would just walk around and then you'd have like, a short performance, and at the end, I really liked that because I could also stand in the crowd and just watch the models do their thing. . . . (Vivian)

At the moment, Vivian is working on developing Feev the Label by attending events such as the Dutch Design Week 2024 at HKU and the OBJECT 2025 design fair in Rotterdam. She complements this with part-time employment in data entry at the Bijenkorf as well as interior design and technical drawing work, although she hopes to be able to focus on Feev the Label full-time in the future.

Judith van Vliet, the fifth interviewee, graduated from HKU (Utrecht) in fashion design in 2012. Gaining work experience with internships including at the Dutch fashion label Gomes Esser Design and under London-based designer Jean-Pierre Braganza, she founded her own label

rooted in storytelling, material experimentation, and sustainability. She showcased her work during three AFW participations, first in 2012 as part of the Lichting show, then in 2015, and again in 2016 as part of the off-schedule program. Now based in Noordwijk, she sustains a freelance practice; designing for clients, teaching creative workshops, and maintaining her slow-fashion ethos through fashion practices such as upcycling and pimping.

Initially educated as a costume designer at the Amsterdam Fashion Institute ('AMFI,' hereinafter), Esther Mutsaers is the next fashion designer who was interviewed for this research. She worked extensively in the theater sector, both as a costume and set designer, before (re)discovering her interest for fashion a few years ago. Inspired by her concern regarding sustainability issues like textile waste management, she founded her brand NUTT Amsterdam in 2021. It consists of a slow-fashion label that upcycles and redesigns discarded clothing into high-quality, high fashion blazers. Esther made her AFW debut in 2024 through The Hub initiative and expressed feeling like the setting particularly suited NUTT Amsterdam's designs, and vice-versa. In her own words, "I was searching for the right target group. And at the Amsterdam Fashion Week, I was like, 'Yeah this is, this is the place where they belong.'" Though she also offers creative concepting coaching in order to diversify her sources of income, Esther considers NUTT Amsterdam to be her primary and full-time focus today.

The seventh interviewee, Susanne Vegter, also originally pursued a career in fashion design. However, she ultimately chose to channel her passion and skills into connecting other creative talent with creative opportunities. She founded Studio Vegter, a recruitment and talent mediation agency that works to bridge the gap between designers and established brands. While Susanne no longer designs or produces fashion herself, her deep understanding of the fashion industry allows her to guide designers through career challenges, advising on strategic positioning, portfolio development, and navigating the balance between creative and commercial aspects of fashion work, thus playing a key intermediary role in the Dutch fashion scene.

Next, the eighth interview was held with Erik Frenken, who studied at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague (*Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten*, known as KABK) and Central Saint Martins ('CSM', hereinafter) in London. He is an experienced fashion designer, having worked for many different brands, notably for Viktor & Rolf from 2005 to 2010, participating in

major fashion shows including Paris Fashion Week. He then became the creative director of the Dutch brand Avelon, showing at AFW several times until the label's closure around 2018 due to financial issues. In 2019, he launched his eponymous label FRENKEN, aiming to balance his creative vision with market viability. Through FRENKEN, Erik produces collections using high-quality leftover fabrics without compromising on production scale, navigating sustainability and commercial pressures simultaneously.

Lola van Praag, the ninth interviewee to partake in this research, graduated from the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam (known as WdKA) in 2014 and was shortlisted for AFW's Lichting prize that same year. She went on to pursue master's degrees in textile design at the University of Borås in Sweden and in menswear at the University of Westminster, in the United Kingdom. Upon returning to the Netherlands, Lola participated in the Covid-altered edition of AFW in 2020. Like Vivian Zandhuis, she was featured in the talent program Visions Of, mentored by Duran Lantink. Today, Lola is working on creating an online platform to connect young designers, particularly those focused on textile and print design, with commercial brands, thus aiming to help them merge creative innovation with practical market access.

Finally, the tenth interview participant is Nila ter Beek. She is also a graduate of WdKA in Rotterdam, where she studied under the tutelage of Dutch designer duo Schepers and Bosman, amongst other professors. Upon obtaining her degree only two years ago in 2023, Nila immediately decided to launch her own sustainable knitwear brand, Vanihila. She is based in Zeist and focuses on creating with a slow fashion approach. Though she has not yet shown at Amsterdam Fashion Week, through collaborations with other designers and with intermediary organizations, she has already presented her work at Milan Fashion Week and London Fashion Week, and is preparing to showcase at New York Fashion Week as well this fall.

Considered both individually and as a whole, this sample of ten fashion designers and creatives provides a range of perspectives on the role that participating in AFW had in their career, as well as broader considerations regarding the fashion ecosystem in the Netherlands. In the following subsections, the key insights collected during the ten semi-structured interviews with research participants (and derived from the thematic coding process of analysis) are presented.

As mentioned, they are divided and organized into the three main themes which emerged from the research results and which are relevant for answering the research question.

4.2 Theme I: The Role of Amsterdam Fashion Week in Career Development

This first thematic subsection presents findings which highlight the role of AFW as an intermediary in Netherlands' CCIs, more specifically in the fashion ecosystem. This includes considerations relating to career visibility, legitimacy, learning experiences, and networking opportunities. These are all positive effects which have a significant role in a field of activity in which professional identity are closely tied to public exposure and presentation, connecting to Evans's (2001, p. 299) writing on fashion as 'representation'. However, limits of AFW's impact also arise from the interview data, such as unmet expectations, a lack of guidance or support, both during and after the event, and relatively few economic benefits to be gained from participating to it. This connects to Caves's (2003, p. 74) principle of 'nobody knows,' confirming its application in both the consumption (demand) and production (supply) side of the creative industries, given the uncertain or variable returns to be reaped in these markets.

Firstly, a salient finding from several of the interviews is that AFW serves as an entry into the world of fashion for a number of emerging designers in the Netherlands. Indeed, five out of the eight AFW participants interviewed showed at the fashion week within a period less than or equal to two years after graduating from their fashion or art studies. For two designers, this was primarily due to their selection for the Lichting prize, a talent event and award established by AFW in order to showcase — through a show during the fashion week — the most promising graduates from Dutch fashion academies each year. Upon graduating from HKU in 2012, Judith was selected to participate in the Lichting show that same year. The same applies to Lola, who took part in the Lichting in 2014, during her last year at WdKA. They expressed feeling honored to have been picked and invited to the event, in particular due to the scale and high production value of the show, especially from their perspective as young graduates. In Judith's words:

> So we also had the full experience, it was really, really cool because it was the first time with the choreography, and the big photographers and a really good DJ, who is doing your

music, and tips for styling and like, everything. Very good models, make-up, hair. Everything was perfect.

Judith was also pleased with the press and media attention that she received as a result of this participation in AFW in 2012, recalling that regardless of another designer being awarded the Lichting award that year, her designs also appeared in numerous media publications. Thus, she began to gain both exposure and visual content, essential assets in the context of creative work which has a primarily aesthetic nature (Godart & Mears, 2009, p. 672).

Maaike and Maartje, who both showed collections in AFW in 2017, also identify the event as one of their first steps into the professional fashion world. Having graduated from KASK only a few months prior to her participation, Maaike attended her first AFW with her master's degree collection. She saw it as a "big project for someone who graduated" so recently, but also as a valuable opportunity to present herself as an emerging designer. Hence, she took the necessary steps to attend the fashion week, despite the investments that it required in terms of both time and funds. Thus, this insight aligns with Throsby (2001, p. 102), who reveals the widespread practice of creative and cultural workers taking on extra work in order to enable their creative undertakings. Likewise, for Maartje, the moment that she was contacted and invited to participate in AFW by its director at the time, Iris Ruisch, was the driving force behind her decision to co-found her brand Studio M.E.N. Regarding AFW, she voiced that it "was the kickstart basically." Like Maaike, Maartje held other part-time jobs while working with her fellow designers on the first Studio M.E.N. collection for AFW's 2017 show. Once again, this confirms theories of multiple-job holding and portfolio careers in the CCIs, as put forth by scholars like Throsby (2001, p. 102) and Handy (1984, p. 8), but in particular highlighting the role of the designer's objective — in this case showcasing at fashion week — in driving these career path choices.

Vivian's participation in AFW in 2020, the same year as her graduation from Cibap, was the result of Duran Lantink — for whom she was interning at the time — encouraging her to attend the event with her innovative designs. She, too, describes her AFW presentation as the "kickstart" of her fashion career, in particular due to the change in professional orientation that it represented at the time for her; from spatial to fashion design. Besides AFW constituting her entry into the fashion industry, Vivian also describes it as the event that "sparked, like, the

motivation, and the dreams of doing it full-time," which highlights the role of AFW not only as a gatekeeper (or perhaps a gate *opener*) of the Netherlands' fashion system, but also as a driving and incentivizing force for the creatives comprised within it, especially those who have shown or aspire to show at the fashion week.

Several interviewees reported benefitting from the greater exposure that AFW granted them. This took on various forms, such as Maaike and Judith mainly highlighting the sources of visual exposure such as media coverage and photographs, while Esther and Vivian perceive an increase in exposure through the connections that they forged through AFW. Both reported that showcasing at the event led to a public figure discovering their designs and subsequently endorsing them, in Esther's case a Dutch actress and fashion model, and in Vivian's case an influencer:

> So she just comes up to me sometimes and we just do all the fittings and she selects a few looks and then she will wear it to like an event, which is also really nice because, it's just . . . a big audience that . . . comes across your work. And it really helps me grow. (Vivian)

For some other designers interviewed, AFW represented a crucial opportunity to network and seek out opportunities for creative collaborations, aligning with the findings of Zhang et al. (2022, p. 86) which support the idea that fashion weeks around the world act as nodes of network exchanges. Maartje recalled forging a number of connections during AFW, including some which evolved into business collaborations; for instance, Studio M.E.N. partnered with Dutch supermarket company Albert Heijn on an upcycling project. Likewise, the label was reached out to by numerous stylists requesting to use their designs for photoshoots, enabling Studio M.E.N. to be featured in fashion magazine publications. In a similar vein, participating in AFW helped Saskia to enter the global network of fashion weeks, again highlighting the inter-place connections between these cyclical events (Zhang et al., 2022, p. 86). Specifically, she was invited to showcase at the Thai Silk International Fashion Week in Bangkok upon her name being recommended by AFW. She perceives her two participations in this event to have been highly beneficial, sharing that "It has had a huge impact on me. Yes, of course, and on my business because I have this added experience and this broader view on what is possible."

In fact, several interviewees emphasized, on more than one account, that AFW represented an important learning experience for them. Especially given many designers' presence at the event shortly after their fashion studies, or in the beginning stage of their career, the interview data revealed distinct acknowledgements that participation offered insight into the practical realities of the fashion industry, from logistics and budgeting, to audience engagement and the instrumentalization of press and media attention. Several respondents also noted that, with the benefit of hindsight and the experience they have gained since, they would approach or utilize their participation in AFW differently today, underscoring the role of events like AFW not only as platforms for visibility but also as spatially and temporally bounded learning environments. As Yagoubi and Tremblay (2017, p. 25) argue, intermediary organizations and structures, such as fashion weeks, can play a formative role in shaping creative workers' trajectories by offering opportunities for knowledge development.

All of the above effects of participation in AFW, including industry access, exposure and visibility, learning, and networking, highlight the benefits of fashion weeks and events like itself for designers. Susanne, from her distinct perspective as a fashion talent recruiter and mediator, corroborated these findings while also introducing some limits of the format, stating that:

> But when we start with the Amsterdam Fashion Week, it offers a platform for emerging talent, with space for experimentation and exposure. However, I believe its overall impact is limited compared to international events, like Paris, or the London Fashion Week. It's smaller in scale and functions more as showcase for new talent than as a fully fletched industry platform, while it can be valuable as a stepping stone. (Susanne)

This suggests that as the fashion week of a second-tier fashion city, AFW still plays a relatively limited role on the global fashion system. Hence, while as aforementioned, Zhang et al. (2022) identify a process of progressive decentralization of fashion, the power structure that has been in place since the establishment of the Big Four fashion capitals appears to be a rather rigid one. Godart (2014, p. 51) explained this phenomenon by saying that although the "Paris-centric monarchic regime" was transformed into one that also comprises London, New York, and Milan, for several decades now "it has been very challenging for newcomers to expand the oligarchic

core of the fashion industry." As such, it is uncertain whether Amsterdam will be able to join the main fashion week calendar in the near future.

Alongside its limited scale and international reach, as mentioned by Susanne, the fashion designers interviewed shed light on other effects which limited the role — or at least the positive effects — of AFW on their professional development. Several felt that the organization of AFW did not sufficiently support the designers during and after their fashion presentations. Saskia, for one, shared that she hasn't "been supported by Amsterdam Fashion Week at all. Not in the branding, not in the promotion. Not before, not afterwards. . . . And I felt lost . . . because I was very un-experienced." Maartje communicated a similar sentiment during her interview; having been invited to show at AFW and therefore founding Studio M.E.N. with the express aim of attending the event, she felt that the organization should have guided the label's trio better in their branding process. According to her, their "brand image wasn't clear at all" and the co-founders of the brand "still had to figure out a lot," so she wishes that AFW had provided more guidance or perhaps given the designers more time to prepare their collection.

Moreover, several of the interview participants shared the financial challenges of participating in AFW. They recalled the time and money required to prepare their collections and organize the logistics of their shows, while also noting that the event itself didn't particularly increase their sales or commercial success. As previously mentioned, some designers had to balance multiple sources of employment in order to generate the revenue required to finance their fashion design activities. Others, such as Maaike and Lola, had to rely on the support of friends and family in order for assistance on the day of the AFW show; indeed, Maaike shared, "I asked all my friends to help me out that day, also like with some food for the models and everything," while Lola believes that without her friends' help, it would have been "impossible" for her to have a collection ready by the day of the show (this was also due to the Covid situation in this edition of AFW in 2020 leading to a particularly short advance notice). This thus echoes Gherardi's (2009, p. 517) insight that informal creative networks like communities of practice can exist without being obvious to their members, and do not need to be reified.

Thus, while AFW exerted several forms of positive influence on its participants' careers, such as granting visibility, experience, and industry connections, these benefits were at times

limited by a lack of creative or commercial support on the part of the organization as well as the economic challenges that its participation entailed for some designers. Moreover, the interviewees reported their awareness of the limited international reach of AFW, nevertheless concluding that despite its relatively conservative scale, the event was a stepping stone on the way to other pursuits for many of them.

4.3 Theme II: Negotiating Identity and Collectivity in the Fashion System

This second theme examines how designers negotiate their place within — and sometimes at the edges of — the fashion system, navigating feelings of alignment, alienation, and emotional complexity in their professional identities. While the fashion world offers symbolic capital (Godart, 2014, p. 43) and aspirational visibility (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006, p. 742), several interviewed designers reflected a degree of ambivalence about belonging, resisting commercial norms or distancing themselves from the industry's status quo. Many insights from the research results underscore a common desire amongst these fashion professionals to retain creative autonomy while seeking alternative forms of collectivity, often through collaborations, peer networks, or shared communities of practice (Gherardi, 2009, p. 515). Identity here is not only personal but relational and shaped by designers' positions within overlapping artistic, geographic, and institutional fields. The emotional labor of participating in fashion (from self-doubt to 'imposter syndrome') also reflects broader challenges of uncertainty (Caves, 2003, p. 74) and symbolic struggle in the CCIs (Throsby, 2001, p. 29).

Already from the stage of pursuing their fashion studies, the designers had to balance their academic and future professional goals with relational dynamics, such as finding an educational institution where they felt they would fit in well. Some, like Maaike, expressed feeling intimidated by, or unready for, elite academies such as the Amsterdam Fashion Institute (AMFI), which she perceived as "a huge step. Also financially. It's the biggest, [most] famous school. It's very international, so I was a bit afraid." Similarly, Judith chose to attend HKU in Utrecht even though she initially also considered ArtEZ in Arnhem as an option, saying that it "is actually kind of a better school, or to The Hague, but I felt there was more pressure. And HKU felt more comfortable." Erik, meanwhile, had to try out several different educational paths before realizing

that art schools, in particular KABK and later, Central Saint Martins in London, were the environment where he felt "at home." This suggests that from an early stage of their fashion path, designers must consider their place in the national network of institutions that surrounds them.

Once they began to work in the field, these dynamics of identity versus belonging persist for many of them. Although all of the interview participants who are still working in fashion design are self-employed, or 'solopreneurs' (a combination of 'solo' and 'entrepreneur'), they all recognized the importance of having access to support networks or creative communities. Indeed, some spoke about valuing their exchanges with fellow fashion designers or creatives in other related sectors. Vivian, for instance, shares her living space with another fashion designer and a spatial-social designer, which she perceives as highly stimulating creatively and mentally given that they share frequent discussions about "how to view things differently." Erik, with his previous company Avelon, was initially highly motivated to expand internationally and operate beyond the borders of the Dutch fashion network. However, now working on his label FRENKEN, he realizes that in the past, he may have underestimated "the importance of a local creative community," and thus now focuses on growing and connecting with stakeholders and consumers locally.

A few participants reported a feeling of alienation, or more often, non-identification with the fashion industry around them. For some, this is due to their choice of target audience. For instance, given that NUTT Amsterdam is a high fashion label, Esther recognizes that the average consumer may not be willing or able to invest in one the label's signature product: unique, sustainable blazers. She shares the difficulties associated with finding — and reaching — her target customer group, mentioning that "it's really a niche." This dynamic applies within or amongst cultural producers as well. Saskia, as designer specializing in haute couture embroidery, does not consider herself as working in 'fashion' per se, saying in her interview "I'm not into fashion that much. . . . I'm not connected to all these people that make the world, the fashion world, in the Netherlands." This reflects a non-identification with the mainstream, more commercialized market for fashion, but also comes from spatial dynamics, since Saskia is based in Doesburg, a significant distance from creative hubs like Amsterdam or the Randstad in general.

4.4 Theme III: The Spatial and Structural Conditions of Creative Work

The geography of creative labor has long been central to understanding cultural production, particularly in fields like fashion that are deeply tied to place-based symbolic capital (Zhang et al., 2022). This theme explores how spatial factors — including the scale and structure of the Dutch fashion scene, the significance of cities like Amsterdam or areas like the Randstad and the home-based atelier model — shape both the opportunities and constraints of emerging designers' careers. The data reflect a shift toward decentralized, self-organized, and often precarious working conditions, revealing how designers create micro-clusters and temporary support systems in the absence of robust institutional backing (Tremblay, 2003; Gherardi, 2009). These spatial patterns intersect with broader structural concerns, including environmental sustainability, infrastructural limitations, and the ongoing tension between artistic intent and commercial survival (Caves, 2003; Throsby, 2001). By tracing how creative labor unfolds across networks, locations, and value systems, this section illustrates the interdependence of individual agency and systemic context in fashion work.

An important spatial dynamic to consider came up during all ten of the interviews; the dominance of Amsterdam in the Netherlands' cultural and creative scene. Those who have been or are currently working in Amsterdam reported several advantages that came with living in this hub of creativity and innovation. For instance, Maartje recalled that when she lived in the capital, she would frequently run into other fashion designers — mentioning Bas Kosters in particular — in the city's streets. In connection to Theme II above, she highlighted the importance of place in building relationships and networks, asserting that "it's still very important to be really at the spot" and that it facilitates "informal conversations" between creatives like herself. This reveals the structural importance of 'seeing and being seen' in the field of fashion, as described by scholars such as Entwistle and Rocamora (2006, p. 742). However, complications arise when considering that important creative hubs often entail limited availability and high cost of physical infrastructure. Indeed, several designers communicated a desire to open stores, for instance in Amsterdam, but acknowledged the extremely high rental fees in the city center. While this urban hub offers cultural capital and visibility, these advantages are often offset by practical barriers to entry. The interviewees spoke of struggling to find affordable studio space, with some opting to

relocate to other cities, or engage in home-based creative practices. For instance, several of the designers have an atelier in their own home, like Nila in her farmhouse in Zeist, who prefers the calm and autonomy that this grants her, in particular when comparing these to the rapid pace of city life. Meanwhile, others open their living space to customers in a salon-like manner, such as Esther with NUTT Amsterdam. This reflects broader spatial inequalities within creative cities, where symbolic value does not always translate into accessible infrastructure for emerging or developing talent (Keane, 2011).

A final point of concern was the lack of strong institutional support structures for fashion designers in the Netherlands. Several of the research participants mentioned benefitting from the help of support structures like non-governmental organizations and non-profit foundations (e.g. *Voordekunst*, Amsterdam Fund for the Arts) for instance in the form of grants or help with funding — Judith even organized a crowdfunding initiative to finance one of her collections. However, the majority of the interviewees felt that the Dutch government should provide more financial support and creative guidance to entrepreneurs in the country's creative sector. Erik expressed feeling supported by the government back when he received a scholarship to attend Central Saint Martins, but noted that in the past fifteen years or so, the government has become more right-wing and taken a step back. He conveyed that it is more difficult for creatives and cultural entrepreneurs like himself to apply for and receive subsidies nowadays, "which is a pity" as it "takes away quality," bringing into consideration the difference between 'art for art's sake' (Caves, 2003, p. 74) versus art for the sake of profit — or even financial subsistence.

4.5 Stop, Slow, Straddle: A Typology of Designer Career Trajectories

The interviews revealed a notable degree of diversity in how emerging fashion designers in the Netherlands navigate their careers, particularly in relation to, and after, their participation in AFW. Building on the three thematic areas explored above — career development through intermediaries, identity and collectivity in the fashion system, and spatial and structural conditions of creative work — this section proposes a typology of designer career trajectories: Stop, Slow, Straddle. The typology and its defining characteristics are summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2: The Stop, Slow, Straddle framework of career trajectories post-AFW participation

Trajectory	Defining Characteristics	Example Outcomes (Occupations & Activities)	Motivations
Stop	Exit from (mainstream) fashion industry	Teaching, interior design, management	Burnout, disillusionment with industry, desire for increased financial security
Slow	Sustainable, small-scale fashion	Slow fashion brands, ethical lines	Sustainability, anti-fast fashion values
Straddle	Balancing art and commerce and/or sustainability and commerce	Brand collabs, capsule collections	Long-term viability of creative practice

These categories reflect the uneven, non-linear paths designers often follow in a field shaped by precarity, limited support structures, and shifting cultural norms (Caves, 2003; Cadin et al., 2000; Tremblay, 2003). Rather than conventional upward career ladders (Tremblay, 2003, p. 84), designers frequently experience pauses or redirections in their professional trajectories (Stop), deliberate pacing of their practice and production due to sustainability values (Slow), or dual navigation between artistic and commercial logics and/or circular and commercial logics (Straddle). These trajectories are not mutually exclusive or fixed; instead, they point to the fluid strategies that designers adopt to sustain themselves both economically and creatively. For many, AFW offers moments of visibility and recognition, but not necessarily sustained support — prompting them to reassess their engagement with the system and explore alternative paths through home ateliers, informal networks, interdisciplinary teaching, or community-led projects. This typology thus highlights how designer careers in the Dutch fashion context are marked not only by ambition or progression, but by strategic withdrawal, adaptation, and hybrid professional

identities. It serves as both a conceptual tool for understanding emerging designer subjectivities, and a commentary on the infrastructural realities that shape cultural labor in the Netherlands.

5. Conclusion

Overall, this thesis research has explored the nuanced effects of participation in Amsterdam Fashion Week (AFW) on designers' career trajectories, with additional insights on how they navigate the uncertainty inherent to work in the cultural and creative industries (CCIs) (Caves, 2003, p. 74). Through a qualitative methodology centered on semi-structured interviews and thematic data analysis, supported by and grounded in a review of relevant academic literature, a novel typology of designer career trajectories has been put forward: Stop, Slow, Straddle. This framework emerged from the rich empirical insights of the ten research participants, who revealed their experiences and strategies for sustaining or at times, redirecting and adapting, their creative practice amidst the precariousness of work in the CCIs. 'Stopping' represents not a retreat, but a tactical withdrawal from the fashion system (or from a specific niche within it) in order to allow for a reorientation and preservation of the creative's identity and values. 'Slowing' reflects intentional deceleration, typically in the form of slow fashion practices, in the face of ever-growing number of ethical and environmental issues in the industry. Thirdly, 'Straddling' captures the simultaneous navigation of multiple dichotomies; art versus commerce, as well as sustainability versus economic viability. These three types of career trajectories complicate the traditional linear or "upward" models of professional progression (Tremblay, 2003, p. 84), and challenge the dominant economistic logic that to this day tends to define success in CCIs, despite the presence of other paradigms of value and meaning-making in these sectors (Throsby, 2001).

In response to the research question, '*How does Amsterdam Fashion Week shape and influence emerging fashion designers' careers?*' the findings collected and analyzed in the sections prior suggest that AFW acts as a formative, though not deterministic, influence. The event primarily functions as a platform for visibility, professional exposure, and learning — providing designers with an initial entry into the fashion world, access to networks, and a practical understanding of the industry's workings. However, its impact is shaped by each designer's individual context, goals, and post-event strategies. The format also appears to have some disadvantages (or areas for potential improvement), such as its restricted scale and international reach. Rather than serving as a clear or future-proof launchpad for commercial success, AFW

appears to facilitate reflection, recalibration, and experimentation, helping designers clarify their creative identities and professional directions in response to the challenges and opportunities encountered both during and after participation.

Nonetheless, the methodological scope of this study presents certain limitations. The interviewee sample contained only ten participants thus a greater number of interviews could increase the reliability of the findings. Additionally, the sampling method could be altered, such as through randomization, in order to try and reach a greater diversity amongst members, especially considering that nine out of ten respondents in this study are female. However, as mentioned in the methodology section, the use of a purposive and contingent approach to sampling served the aim of addressing the research question as directly and effectively as possible, ensuring that participants were highly knowledgeable about the topic and well-positioned to reflect on the role of AFW in shaping designers' — which is to say, *their* — career trajectories. Another potential limitation of the empirical research is that the reliance on retrospective self-narration may invite the influence of memory biases and the smoothing of discontinuities.

Future research could build on this study by potentially incorporating longitudinal or quantitative methodologies to complement the qualitative insights collected, mainly inductively, in this thesis. For a more complex understanding of the role of intermediaries in the CCIs, comparative studies across different cultural sectors (such as music, performing arts, book publishing, or even newer niches such as digital art) could be conducted, in particular so as to enrich the notion of intermediary labor as a phenomenon bridging not only gaps within one area of activity, but across disciplines as well.

The societal relevance of this thesis mainly lies in its reframing of creative labor, in this case fashion design work, as a temporal practice deeply tied to emotional (identity) and social (network) dynamics, and institutional structures. By re-emphasizing the often-overlooked role of intermediaries like fashion shows and fashion weeks, especially in second-tier cities, this thesis contributes to broader debates on the development and sustainability of creative careers in an increasingly globalized and yet fragmented cultural economy. As the CCIs and the stakeholders within these sectors grapple with ongoing uncertainty and transformations, understanding the 'Stop, Slow, and Straddle' trajectories of creative careers becomes ever more vital.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Theme	Questions	Time Range (exp.)
Introduction	- Could you start by introducing yourself and telling me a bit about your background in fashion design? - What initially inspired you to pursue a career in fashion, and how did you establish yourself as a designer? - What are your vision and mission for your work in the fashion industry? What is fashion to you?	5 min

AFW & Career Development	- Can you walk me through your experience participating in fashion weeks and trade fairs in the last 10 years or more?
	- Could you please recall in particular your participation at the Amsterdam Fashion Week (AFW)?
	  ○ What year(s) did you participate, and in what capacity?
	  ○ What were your expectations going into these events?
	- How did you come to participate in AFW (and other trade fairs)?
	  ○ Did you apply, receive an invitation, or get recommended? Could you please elaborate on the process?
	  ○ What factors influenced your decision to showcase your work there?
	- In what ways did participating in AFW impact your career?
	  ○ Did it open up networking opportunities, collaborations, or mentorship?
		15 min

	○ Did it lead to increased media exposure, sales, or job opportunities? - How does AFW compare to other fashion weeks or industry events you've participated in? ○ Would you consider returning to AFW, or do you see it as a stepping stone to other platforms?	
Amsterdam as a Fashion City & the Dutch Fashion Industry	- How would you describe the Netherlands', Amsterdam's, and other Dutch cities' role in the fashion industry? ○ What distinguishes Amsterdam from other fashion capitals like Paris, Milan, or London? - To what extent do you feel the Dutch government, schools, and other intermediaries support designers? ○ What institutional, financial, or creative support is available, and were you able to benefit from it or not? Could you please elaborate? ○ What challenges have you faced as a designer working in the Netherlands?	10 min
Creative Clusters & Networks	- Do you feel part of creative communities and/or networks of designers/artists in Amsterdam/the Netherlands? ○ If not, why? ○ If so, how have these networks influenced your career? ○ Do you see AFW as a space that fosters collaboration and networks? - How important do you think face-to-face interaction is for a designer's success today? ○ Do you think a designer needs to be in a major fashion city to succeed, or has digitalization changed this? Can you elaborate or provide examples?	15 min

	○ What digital platforms/tools do you use in your practice (from design, production to distribution / AI?)	
Fashion Careers & Long-Term Growth	- Looking back, what have been the most defining moments of your career so far? ○ Who or what facilitated your development as a designer? Or blocked it? - What are your long-term career goals, and how do you see the Netherlands/Amsterdam (or other locations) fitting into those plans? - If you could change anything about the Netherlands'/Amsterdam's fashion ecosystem or AFW to better support designers, what would it be?	5 min
Conclusion & Wrap-Up	- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with AFW or your career in fashion? - Do you have any advice for emerging designers who are considering showcasing at AFW?	5 min

Appendix B: Codebook

Code	Code Group 1	Code Group 2	Code Group 3	Code Group 4	Code Group 5	Code Group 6
adding value						
AFW as a learning experience	participating in AFW					
AFW as a networking opportunity	participating in AFW					
AFW as entry into the fashion world	participating in AFW					
AFW as source of visual content	participating in AFW					
AFW granting commercial success	participating in AFW					
AFW granting legitimacy	participating in AFW					
AFW granting recognition	participating in AFW					
Amsterdam as a fashion hub		geography of fashion				
Amsterdam fashion cluster as exclusive		geography of fashion				
Amsterdam fashion lacking unique identity		geography of fashion				
atelier/studio			fashion designer careers			
autonomy			fashion designer careers			
awards and recognition				growth		
balance between creativity and commerce			fashion designer careers			
balance between physical and digital interaction		geography of fashion				
balancing sustainability and economic viability					sustainability	
belonging						
belonging: lack of belonging						support
belonging: sense of belonging						
bridging industry gap						support
change of ownership of AFW	participating in AFW					
change(s) in career path			fashion designer careers			
competition vs. cooperation						support
connections & collaborations gained from AFW	participating in AFW					
cost of sustainable fashion					sustainability	
craftsmanship						
creative collaborations						support
creative vs. business tension			fashion designer careers			
creative workshops			fashion designer careers			
critique of fast fashion					sustainability	
desire for support networks						support
desire to go beyond fashion						
desire to promote circularity					sustainability	
differing visions						
difficulty connecting/networking						support
difficulty selling designs			fashion designer careers			
digital/online tools		geography of fashion				
disillusionment with fashion industry			fashion designer careers			

Code	Code Group 1	Code Group 2	Code Group 3	Code Group 4	Code Group 5	Code Group 6
dissatisfaction with AFW	participating in AFW					
dissatisfaction with university						support
education						
education: education (not art/fashion related)				growth		
education: fashion education				growth		
education: feeling unready for higher education						support
elite institutions as intimidating						support
entrepreneurship			fashion designer careers			
environmental and ethical concerns					sustainability	
exposure				growth		
exposure through celebrity endorsement/collaborations				growth		
fashion (trade) fairs						
fashion as art			fashion designer careers			
fashion cluster in the Randstad		geography of fashion				
fashion internships				growth		
fashion not considered art			fashion designer careers			
feeling lost/alienated			fashion designer careers			
feeling overwhelmed by industry saturation			fashion designer careers			
financial costs associated with fashion projects						support
financial struggles						support
financial support						support
finding comfort in smaller cities		geography of fashion				
focusing on local market		geography of fashion				
freelance work			fashion designer careers			
gap between supply and demand of fashion						
government support						support
greenwashing					sustainability	
home-based creative work			fashion designer careers			
identification with creative community		geography of fashion				
identity rooted in nationality/origin		geography of fashion				
imposter syndrome			fashion designer careers			
individuality & self-expression			fashion designer careers			
inexperience with fashion industry			fashion designer careers			
inspirational designers			fashion designer careers			
intent to grow or develop more				growth		
interest in fashion from childhood			fashion designer careers			
interest in international cultures			fashion designer careers			
intermediation			fashion designer careers			
intrinsic motivation			fashion designer careers			

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	**Code**	**Code Group 1**	**Code Group 2**	**Code Group 3**	**Code Group 4**	**Code Group 5**	**Code Group 6**
80	invitations to other Fashion Weeks	participating in AFW					
81	knowledge-sharing			fashion designer careers			
82	lack of awareness about funding support						support
83	lack of expertise in NL		geography of fashion				
84	lack of guidance from AFW	participating in AFW					
85	lack of material resources/infrastructure						support
86	lack of support from AFW	participating in AFW					
87	limited career impact from AFW	participating in AFW					
88	limited international impact of AFW	participating in AFW					
89	low demand for couture/luxury in NL		geography of fashion				
90	lowering barriers to entry						support
91	manual production			fashion designer careers			
92	meeting market demand				growth		
93	mentorship						support
94	multiple-job holding			fashion designer careers			
95	niche fashion market		geography of fashion				
96	NL as an emerging fashion industry		geography of fashion				
97	non-identification with mainstream fashion			fashion designer careers			
98	opportunity recognition				growth		
99	own fashion label			fashion designer careers			
100	part-time work			fashion designer careers			
101	participating in AFW shortly after graduation	participating in AFW					
102	participation in other fashion events				growth		
103	personalization & customization						
104	platforming young/emerging designers						support
105	pressure to attend fashion weeks						
106	product diversification				growth		
107	proximity to fashion cluster		geography of fashion				
108	raising awareness around sustainabilty					sustainability	
109	recognizing creative strengths			fashion designer careers			
110	rejection of status quo						
111	rejection of traditional work schedule			fashion designer careers			
112	reusing textile waste/leftovers					sustainability	
113	risk-taking				growth		
114	self-employment			fashion designer careers			
115	slow fashion					sustainability	
116	small national fashion industry		geography of fashion				
117	small role of NL in global fashion scene		geography of fashion				
118	small scale of AFW	participating in AFW					

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	**Code**	**Code Group 1**	**Code Group 2**	**Code Group 3**	**Code Group 4**	**Code Group 5**	**Code Group 6**
119	solopreneur			fashion designer careers			
120	struggling with legitimacy as a designer			fashion designer careers			
121	studying abroad						
122	support from family/friends						support
123	supporting others						support
124	symbolic value of AFW	participating in AFW					
125	teaching			fashion designer careers			
126	teaching: teaching (non-art related)			fashion designer careers			
127	teaching: teaching art			fashion designer careers			
128	teaching: teaching fashion			fashion designer careers			
129	technology and innovation						
130	traveling for artistic exploration		geography of fashion				
131	unexpected aspects of AFW participation	participating in AFW					
132	unexpected/uncertain recognition						
133	unpaid work			fashion designer careers			
134	upcycling/pimping clothes					sustainability	
135	value of face-to-face interaction		geography of fashion				
136	working internationally		geography of fashion				