



## Global Luxury Fashion Sets the Agenda

In February, Copenhagen was the venue for the Copenhagen Fashion Week, and design researcher Erik Hansen-Hansen from The Danish Design School was among the participants. He does not however, focus on the topic of the Copenhagen Fashion Week, which is Danish fashion. His field of research is global luxury fashion, and he is interested in the impact of the global luxury brands on the Danish fashion world. In his assessment, they are setting the agenda for much of the world's fashion industry – thus also affecting Denmark's. And he considers it crucial for Danish fashion companies to understand the international networks of the fashion industry.

By Trine Vu

During the countless fashion shows, trade fairs, exhibitions and media events that make up the Copenhagen Fashion Week, Assistant Research Professor Erik Hansen-Hansen from The Danish

Design School was on the sideline, noting, among other things, a brown Louis Vuitton logo bag placed in the middle of a table in a Danish design firm.

And to Erik Hansen-Hansen, that is more interesting than whether the dresses on the catwalk this year are short or long, delicate or edgy. He is a member of the Danish fashion consortium MOKO and studies global luxury fashion. In Copenhagen, the global luxury brands are most conspicuous through their absence. Thus, during the Copenhagen Fashion Week he is keeping an eye out for the small symbols indicating that global luxury fashion does affect on the Danish fashion industry – such as the famous logo bag from the major French fashion house of Louis Vuitton. Logo bags are important because they reveal how consumers relate to the big fashion houses – and because logo bags are a much more lucrative business than the actual designer clothes.

### Widespread Interest in Fashion Research

MOKO works closely together with the Danish fashion industry and the fashion education programmes in the Danish design



Video sequence from Copenhagen Furs' opening show during the Copenhagen Fashion Week. Erik Hansen-Hansen took part in the fashion fair in order to study how the global luxury fashion influences the Danish fashion industry. Photo: Erik Hansen-Hansen

schools to describe the fashion research projects that the consortium takes on. Among other issues, MOKO's design researchers study the financial and cultural cycles of fashion. And even if MOKO's fashion research is still relatively young there is considerable demand for the knowledge generated by the consortium.

"In MOKO we experience widespread interest in fashion research – from the fashion and textile industry as well as from educational institutions and the media. In fact, the demand is so big that we are planning to publish a book with articles about the many different topics in fashion research that MOKO covers. The publication aims to provide a state-of-the-art image of fashion research as it stands right now," says Erik Hansen-Hansen.

**The Missing Link**

In his research project *Luksusmoden og de globale modekontrollbyer* (Luxury fashion and the global fashion control cities) Erik Hansen-Hansen focuses on the world's leading fashion cities: Milan, Paris, London, New York and Tokyo. He has recently returned from a research trip to Italy where one of his goals was to determine whether Rome might be the missing link that explains why Milan –and not, for example, Copenhagen – is an international fashion centre.

"Although fashion and clothes make up a major share of Danish exports, and Danish fashion is internationally recognised, Denmark is not setting the global agenda for global luxury fashion. We don't have world-famous luxury brands that generate international trends, like the Italian brands Prada and Gucci, and this is probably related to our general culture," says Erik

Hansen-Hansen,

"That's one of the issues I went to Rome to explore. In order to understand why Milan became a fashion centre, one has to look at

*"I believe that a strong fashion nation must have strong luxury brands, and here, research has an important contribution to make by providing knowledge to the companies in the fashion industry."*

Rome, and historically, Rome has always had an upper-class lifestyle that has been very influential in creating luxury fashion. In



The Copenhagen Fashion Week, which is held every year in February and August, is the biggest fashion event in Northern Europe. Among other elements, the Copenhagen Fashion Week features fashion shows and three large trade fairs. Photo: Erik Hansen-Hansen

Denmark, by contrast, we have always celebrated simple and rational design. Historically, we have a very modernist, minimalist, almost ascetic approach to design, which simply isn't right for luxury fashion. Luxury fashion is about seduction and beauty. It is ostentatious and provoking – and that's simply a better match for Italian culture," Erik Hansen-Hansen explains.

### Luxury Fashion Sets the Agenda – Also In Denmark

Erik Hansen-Hansen's interest in global luxury fashion is motivated by its ability to set the agenda, stylistically and aesthetically, for much of the world's fashion industry; including the Danish fashion trade. And he believes that if Danish fashion producers want to play a role in the international fashion markets, they will have to understand the workings of the international networks of the fashion industry.

"Knowledge about global luxury fashion and the international networks in the fashion industry is also important if we in Denmark want to create global luxury brands, as the now defunct Annhagen attempted. That has the capacity to generate positive network effects throughout the entire Danish fashion cycle," he says.

"I believe that a strong fashion nation must have strong luxury brands, and here, research has an important contribution to make by providing knowledge to the companies in the fashion industry."

### The Pattern Is the Same

Therefore, Erik Hansen-Hansen's research emphasises network theory, focusing for example on the reflection of larger patterns in smaller trends and developments. During the Copenhagen Fashion Week he observed how the event was structured along precisely the same model as the global luxury fashion fairs.

"The pattern is exactly the same. The hierarchy is the same, and the various roles are distributed in the same way. We just don't have super stars like Karl Lagerfeld or Madonna sitting in the front-row seats at the big shows in Copenhagen. Here, instead they invite a government minister or a former Danish super model," says Erik Hansen-Hansen.

Erik Hansen-Hansen, Ph.D., is an assistant research professor at The Danish Design School and a member of the fashion consortium MOKO. In his research project *Luksusmoden og de globale modekontrolbyer* (Luxury fashion and the global fashion control cities) Erik Hansen-Hansen studies how the global fashion control cities – Milan, Paris, New York, London and Tokyo – affect international luxury fashion. These cities are junctures for flows of information, decisions, capital and labour, and this is also where the value-creating activities of the fashion industry such as design, sale, media, marketing, branding, financing and consumption are concentrated.

The MOKO fashion consortium is a partnership between Kolding School of Design and The Danish Design School under the auspices of the Danish Centre for Design Research and the Danish Museum of Art & Design. MOKO was founded in 2006 and has 8-10 associated researchers. The head of MOKO is Associate Professor, Head of Department Julie Sommerlund. The purpose is to gather, generate and disseminate knowledge about fashion through research, conferences, media and web communication. Last year, MOKO hosted two big international seminars. Other concrete results of the consortium's efforts are reports – including *Dansk mode: Historie, Design, Identitet* (Danish fashion: history, design, identity) by Marie Riegels Melchior and Nikolina Olsen-Rule, which is now used as teaching material in several educational institutions. A report on cooperation between fashion education programmes and the fashion industry is under preparation.

See the articles *Consortiums Open Doors*, Mind Design # 26, *The Story Gives Fashion Products Added Value*, Mind Design #17 and *Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Dissertation is a Weighty Contribution to Danish Design Research*, Mind Design #10.

Cover photo: Erik Hansen-Hansen's main methods of collecting data for his research are interviews, photos and video sequences. During the Copenhagen Fashion Week he took some 1,000 photos, illustrating in various ways how the international luxury fashion leaves its thumb print on the Danish fashion industry. Here, a bag from the leading French fashion house Louis Vuitton. Photo: Erik Hansen-Hansen

### DANISH CENTRE FOR DESIGN RESEARCH

The Danish Centre for Design Research DCDR comprises the design researchers at the Aarhus School of Architecture, The Danish Design School, Designskolen Kolding and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture. The DCDR aims to contribute to establishing a strong design research environment in Denmark and to strengthen the exchange of knowledge about design research and facilitate the identification of potential areas of collaboration for researchers, schools and enterprises, on a national as well as an international level.

### MIND DESIGN

Mind Design, DCDR Webzine is published once a month and features articles and interviews about current Danish and international design research. Mind Design aims to present design research and research findings from researcher to researcher as well as from researchers to design practitioners in general. The webzine is free of charge. Please see [www.dcdr.dk/uk/minddesign](http://www.dcdr.dk/uk/minddesign)

Danish Centre for Design Research  
Philip de Langes Allé 10  
1435 Copenhagen K  
Denmark

+45 32 68 63 68  
dcdr@dcdr.dk  
www.dcdr.dk