

# Fashion and Institutions: The AIIA and the Ready-to-Wear Industry in Italy (1945–1975)

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The Italian Clothing Industry Association (AIIA) was the first employers' association founded to protect the interests of the nascent Italian ready-to-wear industry. According to the literature on the subject, there were three factors that allowed business interest associations (BIAs) to operate effectively at a meso-organizational level: their internal organizational structure, the activities of bureaucratic support of companies and lobbying in defense of entrepreneurs' interests, as well as the ability to adapt to the more general context in which they worked. Based on a detailed empirical analysis, this article examines what the AIIA accomplished in each of these three areas. There are two objectives: (1) analyzing the circumstances that led the AIIA to fail in its purposes of representing the Italian ready-to-wear industry, and (2) investigating, in a typical creative industry, the hidden costs in terms of competitiveness of BIAs' planning efforts and their consequences for the creation of an efficient and internationally competitive fashion system.

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## Business Interest Associations and the Italian Fashion Industry

Historians and other social scientists have only partially focused on business interest associations (BIAs).<sup>1</sup> Business historians are no exception. For a long time the enterprise was the essential unit of analysis, and “this devotion to enterprise has blinkered researchers’ capacity to envision more complex forms of business activity.”<sup>2</sup> The latter group certainly includes BIAs, the initial negative view of which was gradually brought into question.<sup>3</sup> Recent studies have highlighted their ability, in certain conditions and thanks to their operation at a meso-organizational level between markets and hierarchies, to increase the efficiency of the whole sector and therefore go beyond the interests of individual members, thus facilitating the process of economic development.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, business historians’ interest in BIAs is growing steadily.<sup>5</sup> Important journals have dedicated pages to the various forms that business organizations took.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the convergence of interests between the historical and social scientific traditions of research on BIAs also grew.<sup>7</sup> Even if many topics require further empirical research,<sup>8</sup> a growing number of studies deal with the theme from a historical perspective and with a comparative approach, without overlooking regional or local organizations, while paying particular attention to the contribution BIAs made to economic growth.<sup>9</sup> An approach, therefore, that also permits a rapprochement between business history and economic history.<sup>10</sup>

1. I use here the definition of BIAs as synonymous with industry, trade, professional, or employer associations, even though the most recent and updated studies in business and economic history indicate that there are some minor semantic differences between these definitions, which may attribute different meanings to them.

2. Scranton and Horowitz, “The Future of Business History,” 3–4.

3. Among pioneering contributions on the subject, also with a comparative approach, see Galambos, *Competition and Cooperation*; Feldman and Nocken, “Trade Associations and Economic Power”; Yamazaki and Miyamoto, *Trade Associations in Business History*; Scranton, “Webs of Productive Association.”

4. Doner and Schneider, “Business Associations and Economic Development.”

5. E.g., see Walker Laird, “Looking Toward the Future,” 580–584.

6. Stokes et al., “Editorial,” 337.

7. See Lanzalaco, “Business Interest Associations,” 298.

8. In addition to the previously cited Lanzalaco, “Business Interest Associations,” 309–312, see Locatelli and Tedeschi, “New Outlooks,” 203–204.

9. E.g., see the recent Fraboulet et al., *Historical and International Comparison*. On the debate on what institutions are and on the differences between institutions and organizations, see Hodgson, “What Are Institutions?,” 8–13.

10. Jones et al., “The Future of Economic, Business, and Social History,” 231–235. For an interdisciplinary view in the field of social sciences of the impact of economic and political institutions on economic outcomes, see Helpman, *Institutions and Economic Performances*, which also shows the research agenda (even though the role of business organizations is not covered in this volume).

Paradoxically, apart from a few exceptions,<sup>11</sup> these considerations are of limited relevance for Italy—a country with a well-established culture of professional associations and guilds.<sup>12</sup> In particular, they are of even less value with regard to the fashion industry, a key sector of the Italian economy in the postwar period.<sup>13</sup> The fashion industry was characterized by the presence of multiple bodies, organizations, and associations of varying types that were all involved, in different ways and with different aims, in the protection, promotion, and development of the industry's many components.<sup>14</sup> This paper deals with the Associazione Italiana Industriali dell'Abbigliamento (AIIA, Italian Clothing Industry Association), the first industry association, which was set up in 1945 to exclusively protect the interests of the clothing industry and, in particular, the interests of ready-to-wear producers.

### *Objectives*

Historical analysis has highlighted how the functions of the BIAs were essentially those of promoting common values and building networks, providing the entrepreneurial community with a platform for discussion, supplying information and services to its members, and lobbying in favor of their interests. The results obtained by the AIIA in this context will certainly be examined in the coming pages. Nevertheless, recent studies have also shown how, especially during the twentieth century, the BIAs gradually expanded the role they played in social and economic contexts, building upon and going beyond the previously listed functions.<sup>15</sup> The AIIA also seemed fully involved in this process. As well as tackling political and trade union problems, the AIIA concerned itself with questions more closely connected to the organization of the whole textile and clothing production chain (from the creative phase through to promotion and distribution). At the same time, it was

11. Other than studies on the Confederazione Generale dell'Industria, the main Italian industrial association (see Castronovo, *Cento anni di imprese*), studies that focus on BIAs from a historical perspective are extremely rare (e.g., see Berta, *Il governo degli interessi*; Maraffi, "L'organizzazione degli interessi industriali in Italia, 1870–1980"), especially studies that focus on the associations that represent the interests of specific industries. An attempt at this is the work of Lavista on the domestic appliance sector (*Sessant'anni di associazionismo*). There are even fewer studies regarding regional and local associations. Notable examples include the work of Locatelli and Tedeschi on the Associazione Industriale Lombarda (Lombardy Industrial Association) in the previously cited volume by Fraboulet et al. ("Notes on the Genesis and Development").

12. See Guenzi et al., *Corporazioni e gruppi professionali*.

13. Belfanti, "La moda," 497.

14. See Belfanti, *Calze e maglie*, 115–150; Merlo, *Moda Italiana*, 71–131; Paris, *Oggetti cuciti*, 83–505. For a brief overview of the most important bodies involved in the protection of Italian fashion, see also Frisa et al., *Bellissima*.

15. See Locatelli and Tedeschi, "New Outlooks."

particularly involved in the management of a variable such as fashion, which was crucial for the planning of the entire production cycle, but somewhat unstable and particularly sensitive to social, economic, and cultural changes.<sup>16</sup> The analysis of the achievements of the AIIA in this area—and of the possible consequences also outside the boundaries of the ready-to-wear industry—are the focus of this article. The Comitato Moda degli Industriali dell'Abbigliamento (Ready-to-Wear Fashion Council) was expressly set up to support a genuine project of “planning” fashion, centralizing strategic decisions regarding influential factors such as fabrics, colors, and reference styles of clothing. This strategy was then extended across national borders with the objective of coordinating production decisions of the textile industry, clothing producers, and fashion houses to guarantee the maximum level of uniformity at an international level.

In short, this work has two objectives. The first one is to highlight the achievements of the AIIA with reference to its principal statute objective (that of supplying companies with services and lobbying in favor of the sector), identifying the reasons that, starting from the late 1960s, led the AIIA to fail in its aim of representing the whole ready-to-wear industry. In light of the AIIA's effort to provide tools to cope with fashion turbulence by means of national and international planning, the second objective is to investigate, in a typical creative industry (in which managing creativity and business is a complex process),<sup>17</sup> the hidden costs in terms of competitiveness of the planning efforts made by BIAs. Because the industrial sector, rather than haute couture, played a key role in the international success of Italian fashion, we can also highlight the effects of this strategy on the creation of an efficient and internationally competitive fashion system that was set up to the advantage of all the players in the Italian fashion industry, not only the ready-to-wear component, and that helped Italy become one of the most competitive countries in the world in this area in just a few years.

### Sources

Research has been carried out using primary sources and specialized magazines of the time. The lack of a historical AIIA archive is compensated for by the availability of original documents produced by the same, which are now available at the Archivio Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda (Tremelloni Textile and Fashion Archive). Important information is also available in the archive of the premier

16. For a long-term view see Belfanti, *Civiltà della moda*. On the debate of “planning” in the 1960s as a cultural framework influencing industrial elites, see Lavista, *La stagione della programmazione*.

17. On this topic, see Pouillard, “Managing Fashion Creativity.”

institution of Italian fashion, the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (CNMI, the Italian National Chamber of Fashion), which contains largely untapped information regarding the relationships between high fashion, the textile industry, and the clothing industry. The analysis of print periodicals from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s concentrated on the most important fashion clothing magazines (*Bellezza*, *Novità*, *Grazia*, *Linea*, *Amica*), and above all on specialized magazines aimed at the textile and clothing industry (*I Tessili Nuovi*, *Confezione Italiana*, *Tecnica della Confezione*, *Informazioni EIM*, *L'Abbigliamento Italiano*). In particular, *Confezione Italiana* (the official periodical publication of the AIIA) and *L'Abbigliamento Italiano* (the official periodical publication of Salone Mercato Internazionale dell'Abbigliamento (SAMIA) of Turin, one of the most important European markets specializing in ready-to-wear, with which the Ready-to-Wear Fashion Council had a privileged relationship) were of particular interest.<sup>18</sup>

### Origins and Objectives: The Autonomy of the Ready-to-Wear Industry

This section concentrates on the origins and the objectives of the AIIA and aims to highlight the reasons for its foundation. To this end, it is necessary to define the situation of the Italian clothing industry at the end of the World War II. In fact, just as the organization, development, and influence of trade associations may affect the economic determinants of an industry and, by implication, of the whole economy, the state in which the industry finds itself has inevitable effects upon the organization, development, and influence of trade associations (and therefore upon their potential effectiveness). As a result, the political, social, and economic role of these associations can only become clear when the political, social, and economic context is fully understood.<sup>19</sup>

According to sources at the time, the situation faced by the various sectors of the Italian fashion industry at the end of the World War II (April 1945) was rather complicated. In particular, the textile and clothing industries were faced with a shortfall in production infrastructure, to which inefficiency of the distribution system and limited domestic demand were added. If the most important path to be followed was identified as an increase in exports, it was therefore necessary to seek a significant quantitative and qualitative improvement in

18. See Paris, "Orígenes del Made in Italy"; "Una nuova iniziativa"; "Elenco delle aziende aderenti al Comitato moda"; "Rinnovata partecipazione al SAMIA"; "Le conferme di Torino."

19. Feldman and Nocken, "Trade Associations and Economic Power," 414–415.

production, something that could only be guaranteed by investment in modern machinery and more rational organization.<sup>20</sup> The rapid diffusion and sharing of new skills and knowledge that this renewal involved created a strong stimulus for the foundation of an organization that, as well as protecting the interests of the sector, could also help fulfill these needs. Therefore it is no surprise that the AIIA, a free association of ready-to-wear companies, was founded in Milan on May 8, 1945, just thirteen days after the end of the war.<sup>21</sup>

The objective of the AIIA, which immediately joined the Confederazione Generale dell'Industria Italiana (Confindustria, the main Italian industrial association), was to make the ready-to-wear sector autonomous, primarily by giving more power to its lobbying activities.<sup>22</sup> This autonomy took three directions. The first area of interest was tailoring (artisan production), a sector that between the wars had a commanding position in the Federazione Nazionale Fascista dell'Abbigliamento (National Fascist Clothing Federation), a trade association that included all parts of the Italian fashion industry.<sup>23</sup> Second, although some textile companies also continued to produce ready-to-wear garments, the AIIA ratified the autonomy of the ready-to-wear sector from the textile industry. Finally, the creation of the AIIA also demonstrated

20. E.g., “Bisognava che i tempi diventassero difficili”; Brown, “Cosa ne pensa un ‘Americano’”; Robiola, “Dall’ago al milione”; Comitato Nazionale per la Produttività–Comitato Interministeriale per la Ricostruzione, *La produttività nell’industria tessile*, 7–8.

21. The foundation of the association was attended by the most authoritative representatives of all sectors of the nascent ready-to-wear Italian industry, thus giving it the necessary authority to both perform the tasks and achieve the objectives listed in the statute. The first Board of Management consisted of the following members: Giulio Goehring (president of AIIA and owner of the Milanese Fabbrica Italiana Biancheria), Mario Merati (vice president and owner of SAIRA), Alfredo Marchetti (vice president and owner of MAIM), Severino Meregalli (vice president and owner of Rossi & Meregalli), Edoardo Bellavista (De Micheli), Alfredo Bertè (Lo Presti Turba), Luigi Cattaneo (Martinetta), Francesco Dell’Orto (Stella & C.), Franco Diana (Diana Ferdinando), Alberto Fumagalli (Fumagalli Attilio), Francesco Laurora (Laurora Antonio), Catullo Maffioli (Mafbo), Luigi Maglia (Maglia Francesco), Riccardo Molteni (Molteni Riccardo Manifattura), Fernando Petrella (Sacchi F. & C.), Renzo Poletti (Poletti Antonio & C.), Riccardo Teseo (Abital) and Luigi Wollisch (Petronius). See AIIA, *Quarant’anni di abbigliamento* (pp. 3–4), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive.

22. Some scholars have demonstrated that a new business class had to be built through bodies like BIAs. This is the case, e.g., made by Phillips Sawyer (“Trade Associations”), who implicitly demonstrates this thesis while analyzing the rise of the American Chamber of Commerce in the 1920s.

23. AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (pp. 2–3), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive; Giulio Goehring, “L’industria della confezione in Italia”, in AIIA, *Guida della confezione*, Milan, 1961 (p. 20), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive. On the relationship between the fascist regime and fashion, see Gnoli, *La donna, l’eleganza, il fascismo*.

the clear separation of the knitwear and hosiery industry (a sector with a long tradition in Italy, especially in the north).<sup>24</sup> At that time and for the same reasons, the knitwear and hosiery industry set up its own trade association, the Associazione Italiana Produttori di Maglierie e Calzettarie (Italian Association of Producers of Knitwear and Hosiery). Given the wide variety of roles covered by the two associations, some partial overlap was inevitable.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the AIIA aimed to protect a sector that was traditionally complementary to that of knitwear from both technological/productive and product-related points of view.

Therefore, the creation of the AIIA signaled a clear separation between the industrial and the artisan sectors, formalizing the existence of a lively, if young, Italian ready-to-wear garment industry.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, it gave entrepreneurs an essential tool to protect their interests, supporting the development of the sector and strengthening their position with interlocutors within the nascent Italian fashion industry.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the foundation of the AIIA also sanctioned the start of a process of union fragmentation, which reached a peak in 1958 with the foundation of the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, an association that followed in the footsteps of the French *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture* to protect the interests of the high-fashion houses. This situation fully reflected the structure of the Italian fashion industry, which was made up of sectors—the textile industry, the ready-to-wear industry, the knitwear industry, and high fashion—that were disinclined to collaborate, as each catered to markets that were economically and socially distinct and that were also expanding due to increasing incomes and the start of the process of European integration.

Therefore, the experience of the AIIA also seems to confirm the very close connections between BIAs and the more general political, social, and economic context. In essence, if the particular politico-legal situation between the wars prohibited organizations like the AIIA, the new economic and social postwar context, along with the urgent needs of the ready-to-wear sector, accelerated its creation once the conflict had ended.

24. See Belfanti, *Calze e maglie*, 19–102.

25. On the duties of the BIAs active in this period in the clothing textile sector, see Confindustria, *Annuario 1958*, 1275–1277.

26. On the situation of Italian ready-to-wear industry between the wars, see Paris, “Industrie di confezione a serie.”

27. AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (pp. 1, 3–4, 7), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive. Giulio Goehring, “L’industria della confezione in Italia,” in AIIA, *Guida della confezione*, Milan, 1961 (pp. 19–21), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive. AIIA, *Le cariche, lo staff, i servizi* (p. 7), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive; “Associazione italiana industriali dell’abbigliamento.”

## Organizational Structure, Activities, and Services to Protect the Interests of Members and Promote the Development of the Sector

The first factor that influences the ability of industry associations to pursue particular strategies is the strength of their internal organization—high member density, or encompassment, is central to associative capacity.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, business history studies actually continue to undervalue the role of BIAs' bureaucratic support for enterprise and their lobbying activities in defense of entrepreneurs' interests—fundamental activities that make membership in a BIA attractive.<sup>29</sup> Therefore it is necessary to examine both of these factors in greater detail to better understand the role played by the AIIA.

### *Organizational structure of AIIA*

The organizational structure and the rules that drove the formation and management of government committees, defined by a statute detailing the objectives of the association (art. 3), fully reflected the will of the AIIA to be wholly inclusive,<sup>30</sup> first of all toward the various products of the ready-to-wear industry, which ranged from underwear to menswear and ladies' clothing (the subdivision of members into "sections" gave each space to discuss the problems most closely related to their own particular product sectors), and second, toward all subjects who were not part of the ready-to-wear industry but who could have been helpful in the pursuit of the statutory objectives.

At the same time, the statute also protected smaller members, thanks to a voting system that limited the decision-making power of larger companies by disassociating the number of votes assigned to each member from the total subscriptions paid (art. 10). Taking into account the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) was a decision that proved to be of particular importance in Italy, because the SMEs represented the foundation of the national manufacturing system, not only in the textile and clothing industries.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the particular composition of the Consiglio Direttivo (Board of Management), the central body that set AIIA policy and oversaw the effective pursuit of its statutory

28. Coleman and Jacek, "The Roles and Activities," 278–280; Doner and Schneider, "Business Associations and Economic Development," 270–275.

29. Ville, "Rent Seeking or Market Strengthening?," 301–303.

30. AIIA, *Statuto*, Biblioteca Tremelloni del tessile e della Moda Historical Archive; AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (p. 3), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive.

31. There is an extremely large body of work on the subject. A valuable starting point is Colli, *I volti di Proteo*.



objectives, also ensured adequate geographical representation within the management structures (arts. 15–41). While the most productive regions for textiles and clothing during the 1950s were those in the northwest of the country, the AIIA ensured attention was given also to companies operating in areas that could otherwise have been underrepresented.

Finally, the statutes provided for a three-year term of office for positions of responsibility, and members were prohibited from joining associations or bodies deemed to be in competition with the interests of the AIIA. Again, the objectives were twofold. On one hand, the AIIA sought to reduce the risk of early defection by members, which would reduce the relevance of the association; on the other hand, the association wanted to limit possible conflicts of interest and the formation of internal lobbying groups. The organizational structure of the AIIA was, therefore, designed to meet the needs and represent the interests of all companies in the ready-to-wear industry, irrespective of their size, geographical location, or production specialization. In this way the AIIA became more representative and attractive while simultaneously increasing both the potential efficiency and efficacy of its actions.

#### *Activities and services*

The statute also listed the actions that the AIIA should carry out in support of the individual members and to promote development of the sector (art. 3, para. b), thereby acting both as a network (internally) and as a node (externally) to achieve several objectives.<sup>32</sup> This was a wide range of activities that extended across national borders. For this reason, in 1947, the AIIA, together with other European trade associations, formed the European Association of Clothing Industry (AEIA). In this way it was possible to actively participate in the development of the international clothing industry. Primarily, with the aim of comparing Italian entrepreneurial experiences with those of other industrialized nations and exerting stronger political pressure at the continental level, and secondly, in the light of the imminent start of the process of European economic integration, to facilitate the acquisition of information and skills that were necessary to tackle foreign markets. The constitution of the European Clothing Technical Commission within the AEIA, for example, allowed the AIIA access to the most important technological research being carried out (especially on textiles) and information regarding norms and technical standards.<sup>33</sup> The subjects

32. E.g., see the case of a professional association such as the Pharmaceutical Society of Australasia (Boyce, “A Professional Association”).

33. AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (p. 9), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive; “Compiti e finalità dell’AEIA,” 39, 44–45.

of product labeling and the standardization of sizes were particularly strategic. First, because the standardization of sizes, essential for mass production of clothing, was necessary to complete the reorganization of production that Italian companies had started with the adoption of new production techniques and operational methods from the United States and other more advanced European countries. Second, because they were both questions to be resolved if exports were to increase in the future, both to meet the needs of the new consumers and to protect and guarantee the origin and quality of products.<sup>34</sup>

To comply with its statutory obligations, the AIIA also carried out a wide range of market-complementing activities (supply of private goods) that, by reducing members' transaction costs, incentivized cooperation between companies and reinforced the role of the AIIA itself.<sup>35</sup> These services, under the control of the appropriate offices, ranged from assisting members participating in the most important Italian and foreign trade fairs to supporting members with a constant supply of statistical and market data, collaboration with professional institutes for training courses, and tax and legal assistance.<sup>36</sup> At the same time the AIIA undertook a long series of market-supporting activities (supply of public goods) aimed at protecting and promoting the entire textile and clothing sector; for example, promoting exports thanks mainly to close collaboration with the Istituto Nazionale per il Commercio Estero (ICE, National Institute for Foreign Commerce)—a noneconomic public body set up for the promotion and development of commerce with foreign countries and the internationalization of the Italian production system.<sup>37</sup> Thanks to its global network of offices, the ICE presented itself as a strategic outpost that supported the AIIA in collecting valuable information, while offering consultancy and assistance to the AIIA in the organization of commercial and promotional activity, and to members opening branches abroad.<sup>38</sup> But the AIIA also obtained appreciable

34. If the Marshall Plan was important for the initial technological renewal of the Italian textile industry (Merlo, *Moda Italiana*, 76–83), the impact of the American manufacturing model was decisive for the whole fashion industry (White, *Reconstructing Italian Fashion*). On the subject of sizes, see Merlo, “Size Revolution”; on sull’etichettatura (labeling), see Merlo, “Le etichette.”

35. Cooperation has to be seen as a strategic choice, based on an assessment of the imperfections of the market. Consequently, the decision to associate is lost at the moment when “acting as a collective” can no longer increase its economic agency (Carnevali, “Crooks, Thieves, and Receivers”).

36. AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (pp. 4–8), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive.

37. On the origins of ICE and the role it played in the period immediately following the World War II, see Nocentini, “Alle origini dell’Istituto Nazionale per il Commercio Estero”; Nocentini, “L’ICE e la distribuzione degli aiuti.”

38. AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (p. 9), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive; Paris, *Oggetti cuciti*, 257–262.

results in terms of import controls, above all for low-cost products from non-European countries that benefited from lower labor costs. In collaboration with the relevant authorities, this question was tackled at both a national and international level by working with European sister associations on the definition of the best regulatory instruments for the international commerce of textiles.<sup>39</sup> The most noteworthy of these were the commercial agreements, in particular, the Multifiber Arrangement, which until 2005 regulated international commerce of textile products and clothing, setting quotas for imports from developing countries.<sup>40</sup>

Lobbying activity should not be forgotten, and this was also carried out at the national level (the AIIA had a political office in Rome, especially set up to maintain constant relations with Parliament and the government) and in Europe (the AEIA set up a commission, in permanent contact with Executive Commission of the Common Market). Excellent results were achieved, above all in the fiscal field.<sup>41</sup> More significant for the future of the AIIA was the role played within the Comitato Consultivo della Moda (CCM, Italian Fashion Consultative Committee). Set up by the Ministry of Industry in 1967, the CCM had the task of promoting greater collaboration between the various components of the Italian fashion industry and was guided by the Ente Italiano della Moda (EIM, Italian Fashion Body). The EIM was a public body with political origins, set up in 1951 from the remnants of the fascist Ente Nazionale della Moda (National Fashion Body), which was charged with protecting the interests of the nascent (and strategic) Italian fashion industry, coordinating initiatives to guarantee more rational use of public funds.<sup>42</sup> Historical research has highlighted how the connections between BIAs and state or supra-state organizations could be risky in terms of loss of autonomy and consequent

39. AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (pp. 10–12), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive; Pent Fornengo, *L'industria italiana dell'abbigliamento*, 58–60.

40. This agreement was positive for Italian companies, but not for consumers, which paid more for their goods. Some scholars have highlighted that the implementation of the MFA led to a situation of consumer welfare loss in developed countries (e.g., see Faini et al., “A Primer on the MFA Maze”).

41. AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (p. 12), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive.

42. Gnoli, *La donna, l'eleganza, il fascismo*. See also Simonetto, “L'Ente Italiano della Moda”; “L'Ente Italiano della Moda riprende la sua attività”; “Lo Statuto dell'Ente Italiano della Moda.” Political and economic institutions matter for economic growth and are inextricably linked: both develop alongside and in interaction with each other. For an overview on this topic, see Tylecote, “Institutions Matter,” which analyzes three seminal books that share this view of institutions (those of North et al., *Violence and Social Orders*; Van Zanden, *The Long Road*; and Acemoglu and Robinson, *Why Nations Fail*); and John and Phillips-Fein, *Capital Gains*, which explores the relationships between American business and politics in the twentieth century while also analyzing the role of BIAs. For an overview of the Italian case, see Di Martino and Vasta, *Ricchi per caso*, 183–230.

dissatisfaction of members.<sup>43</sup> In this case, however, the AIIA could operate in close contact with a body that, in reality, was the representative of political power in the world of Italian fashion, and whose informal consent was necessary for the implementation of almost all promotional activities.<sup>44</sup> Together with its market support and lobbying activities, the participation of the AIIA at the CCM also helped to increase the contractual power of the ready-to-wear sector, thus consolidating the role of the AIIA itself. This situation is confirmed by the constant increase in member numbers, which could certainly be considered a valid gauge of the attractiveness of the AIIA.

### The New Structure of Demand During the Sixties

As well as being dependent upon the strength of its associative structure, the ability of each BIA to reach its objectives also depends on the constraints imposed by the environment in which the BIA operates and, as a consequence, its ability to adapt to the changes in the economic, social, cultural, and institutional context.<sup>45</sup> External pressure and conditions influence the ability of industry associations to pursue particular strategies. During the Sixties, that which could be simply defined as “fashion risk” was probably the factor that every company had to consider the most. The “fashion variable” played an ever more important role in influencing purchasing decisions and strongly conditioned the entire production cycle. The tools brought into play by the AIIA to manage this variable, therefore, had the primary goal of more efficiently organizing the entire production process. A brief summary of the situation faced by the Italian fashion system and the more general context during this period is necessary to fully understand the problem.

The 1960s was a crucial decade for the young Italian fashion industry. If the 1950s were the years of its formation (starting from the organization of the Italian Fashion Show in Florence in 1951)<sup>46</sup> and the 1970s those of its definitive establishment in international markets (with Milan as the new capital of Italian fashion),<sup>47</sup> the 1960s were

43. E.g., Svendsen, “Associational Autonomy or Political Influence?”

44. “Comitato consultivo della moda”; EIM-CCM, *Atti del Comitato Consultivo della Moda*; “Relazione del Consiglio Direttivo,” folder no. 3, December 16, 1967, Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana Historical Archive; Ministero dell’Industria, Commercio e Artigianato, *Atti del Comitato Consultivo della Moda*, 1969, Biblioteca Tremelloni del tessile e della Moda Historical Archive.

45. Ville, “Rent Seeking or Market Strengthening?,” 298.

46. Pinchera, “Firenze e la nascita della moda italiana.”

47. Merlo and Polese, “Turning Fashion into Business”; Segre Reinach, “Milan: The City of Prêt-à-Porter.”

without doubt a time of genuine metamorphosis. The evolution of a demand that was structurally different compared with that of the previous decade caused a series of changes that also impacted upon supply, including the fashion supply chain. This stimulated the systematic formalization of relations among players in the Italian fashion industry, facilitating the positioning of the Made in Italy brand as one of the most prestigious in the world market.<sup>48</sup>

During the 1950s, Italian clothing supply was divided into two separate realities with little communication between them. On one side there was high fashion, that is artisan production of made-to-measure garments essentially aimed at an elite group of customers.<sup>49</sup> High fashion managed the entire process of stylistic and conceptual evolution of fashion, maintaining leadership in taste that was expressed with seasonal renewal of styles. On the other side was the ready-to-wear industry, which mass produced clothes within large-scale industrial complexes.<sup>50</sup> Benefiting from new opportunities offered by artificial and synthetic fibers,<sup>51</sup> the ready-to-wear industry also grew in terms of quality, although products remained strongly standardized and depended on what appeared on the catwalks of high fashion in Florence, Rome, and Paris.<sup>52</sup> Somewhere between the exclusivity of high fashion and the anonymity of mass-produced garments, boutique fashion could be found. This was a typically Italian product, in some senses similar to the prêt-à-porter of Paris, which combined the quality of the artisan with the potential for mass production and the label of famous tailors—thus meeting the needs of the young dynamic woman (simple, sporty designs using quality materials at affordable prices).<sup>53</sup> Ready-to-wear, high fashion, and boutique fashion therefore supplied clothes to a range of customers with entirely different needs and budgets. During the 1950s, there was rigid segmentation of demand and supply, which guaranteed each of the three production sectors ample earnings and space for development, including beyond national borders.

The situation changed radically during the 1960s. A greater number of consumers who were more discerning and demanding and who had greater purchasing power started to select the goods offered by the market, judging value also in terms of social status.<sup>54</sup> The ready-to-

48. Paris, "Fashion as a System."

49. See Gnoli, *Un secolo di moda italiana*; Steele, *Fashion, Italian Style*.

50. Paris, *Oggetti cuciti*, 307–319.

51. See Colli, "Fibre chimiche"; Blaszczyk, "Du Pont de Nemours."

52. On the French case, see Steele, *Paris Fashion*.

53. On boutique fashion, see Paris, *Oggetti cuciti*, 218–231. On French prêt-à-porter, see Grumbach, *Histoires de la mode*, 125–176; Lipovetsky, *L'empire de l'éphémère*, 131–145, 151–153.

54. Ragone, "I consumi in Italia"; Scarpellini, "People of plenty."

wear industry found itself in difficulty in this new context, as the quality–price relationship it offered was no longer sufficient. Clothes gained greater social value, which the increasing relevance of fashion helped to increase.<sup>55</sup> The entire fashion industry was forced to face an ever more diversified and complicated market within which both women and new generations were fully involved in the mechanisms of consumption. This quantitatively relevant presence had two significant consequences: the emergence of a demand that was new in terms of both taste and price and the inversion of the whole fashion cultural process. The reference point was no longer the lady of high society, but the young, dynamic woman.<sup>56</sup>

These changes had repercussions for the entire production chain, including the delicate creative phase. How did the ready-to-wear industry adapt to this new scenario? The relevance of the phenomenon of fashion and its ever more noticeable variability required a change in the strategies used for programming the entire production cycle of garments, including those of prediction and subsequent support of new trends.<sup>57</sup> High fashion was no longer the reference point, because the new youth cultures saw it as a symbol of an outdated social model, and therefore went elsewhere to seek role models in terms of fashion trends.<sup>58</sup> For the more, the need for the industry to program production at least one year in advance of the season in which a new collection would be launched did not allow the industry to wait for the high-fashion shows, which took place just a few months in advance of market launch. Fashion was an enormous opportunity for the industry, but unless controlled, represented a double-edged sword. This entailed the creation of strategies aimed at reducing the factor known as “fashion risk.” Two paths taken by ready-to-wear companies. Some smaller, more flexible companies started to collaborate with young designers who worked exclusively for their own generation. Others, more involved with the production for the mass market, chose a different route, implementing a genuine program of “centralized” planning and control of fashion, starting at the beginning of the 1960s.<sup>59</sup> These two different approaches highlight that associationalism within the Italian ready-to-wear sector, at least among the major companies, emerged in the absence of a strong custom of cooperation with the other players in

55. “La moda e l’eleganza”; Bottero, “Democrazia del lusso.”

56. Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas*; De Grazia and Furlough, *The Sex of Things*; English, *A Cultural History of Fashion*; Liguori, “Donne e consumi”; Sassatelli, “Genere e consumi”; Savage, *The Creation of Youth Culture*.

57. Ronco, “I problemi produttivi.”

58. Breward, *Fashioning London*; Breward et al., *The London Look*; Paris, “Moda e programmazione industriale”; Polhemus, *Street Style*.

59. Legnazzi, “Pianificazione e coordinamento.”

the fashion industry and among the different BIAs dealing with the fashion industry, both of which were already clearly evident in the early 1950s.<sup>60</sup> This process was then accelerated by the pressure of the organizational and technological constraints that the socio-economic changes of the 1960s made more complex to manage.

### The Comitato Moda degli Industriali dell'Abbigliamento (CMIA, Ready-to-Wear Fashion Council)

The supporters of the second strategy, in fact, included the AIIA, which was fully aware of the consequences of so-called fashion risk.<sup>61</sup> The economic damage that resulted from the rapid depreciation of products influenced by fashion was considered to be serious, and the reason for this was clearly evident. The increase in the scale of production and the economies of scope that had facilitated the success of the most important companies and sustained growth in the sector during the previous ten years generated technical and organizational rigidity that risked the survival of those companies, as they could not manage the frequent variability of fashion. Finding the most suitable tools to mitigate fashion risk therefore meant safeguarding the future of the entire sector.

The constitution of the CMIA (1959), based on the initiatives of important entrepreneurs who were members of the AIIA, pointed in this direction.<sup>62</sup> The caliber of members, such as the Gruppo Finanziario Tessile (GFT), Max Mara, and Manifattura Lane Marzotto was a guarantee of the potential efficacy of its actions.<sup>63</sup> However, there was also a risk of unbalancing its action in favor of just one group of producers (the biggest, most of which were located in Milan and Turin, the two poles of the Italian ready-to-wear industry). It is true that these were the companies that suffered most from the variabilities of fashion. Other smaller and more flexible firms were doing well. The risk of the whole project was therefore that of compromising the utility and the ability to represent not just the CMIA, but also the AIIA (the president of the CMIA, Giancarlo Pasini, was also the vice president of the AIIA).

60. See Paris, "Fashion as a System," 531–536. This also happened in other creative industries, as for pottery in the United Kingdom, where associationalism was not a formal expression of an informal spirit of cooperation (see Popp, "An Indissoluble Mutual Destiny").

61. "Primo congresso nazionale."

62. "Un'indagine di mercato sulle vendite"; "L'assemblea del Comitato Moda"; "Comitato moda degli industriali dell'abbigliamento italiano."

63. Berta, *Appunti sull'evoluzione del Gruppo GFT*; Bairati, *Sul filo di lana*; Roverato, *I Marzotto*.

The CMIA had two main functions: to define, with sufficient advance notice for the programming of the production cycle, the materials, colors, and styles that would be the reference point for the new collections, and to establish a whole series of actions aimed at informing and guiding the media, retailers, and consumers.<sup>64</sup> Its role was not to be a mere fashion predictor, but to define, upstream of the production process and well in advance, the distinctive characteristics of the fashion collections to be launched. The committee acted at both national and international levels in the pursuit of its objectives, in collaboration with similar bodies, as the management of the fashion variable was a problem that impacted the fashion industry in all developed countries. Similar organizations were set up across Europe with the same objectives (such as the Comité de Coördination des Industries de la Mode founded in France by the French Trade Organization for Women's Clothing) and were coordinated at a supranational level by the AEIA.<sup>65</sup>

The first supranational agreements, even if initially limited to the definition of a common color swatch, had already arrived by the middle of the 1960s and also involved important non-European countries such as Japan and the United States (each individual national fashion council would have then published and promoted these choices to local producers).<sup>66</sup> These agreements met with a very positive reaction, yet there was a hidden negative aspect that was totally overlooked. With these agreements, in fact, larger companies were obliged to relinquish parts of their decision-making autonomy to third parties in exchange for a reduction of risk connected with the variability of fashion. In the following paragraph we will see in more depth how this choice carried a penalty and did not prevent a crisis in the ready-to-wear sector. This was because the creative phase is crucial for the whole production process. As a consequence, unifying and delegating the definition of the peculiar characteristics of every collection to other bodies was a choice that removed from the hands of companies an important tool for market competition and differentiation. It can be stated that, in substance, the true role of fashion councils was to make up for the lack of a creative phase within many of the largest clothing companies (or, at least, reduce tensions between management and creativity).<sup>67</sup>

64. "Comitato moda degli industriali dell'abbigliamento italiano."

65. "Esclusa l'Italia dall'Imos"; "Comunità europea per i colori di moda"; "Comitati e finalità dell'AEIA"; Blaszczyk, *Producing Fashion*.

66. Legnazzi, "Il coordinamento internazionale"; Goehring, "Prevedere la moda."

67. The first BIA in the fashion industry to face this tension between management and creativity was the French *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*. During the interwar period, members regularly shared information and developed common policies with regard to questions of management, but did not develop



In order to fully understand the role of the CMIA, it is also necessary to investigate its accomplishments in informing and guiding the media, retailers, and consumers. Each fashion council was, in fact, simultaneously a center for both the collection and diffusion of information. Obtaining technical and market information facilitated cooperation between companies and, therefore, also from this point of view the activity of the CMIA could help to reinforce the role of the AIIA.

There were several specifically designed tools available to achieve these objectives, even though the organization of informative events and the use of the specialized press were the ones most widely used. It is true that these were traditional tools, but there was no lack of experimentation. Not so much with regard to printed material, as the CMIA simply edited specialized magazines for producers, buyers, and retailers, as well as occasionally publishing in newspapers with large circulations.<sup>68</sup> In particular, careful attention was paid to retailers who were considered to be strategic, not only for their informative role,<sup>69</sup> but also for their ability to influence the buying decisions of consumers. For this reason, some retailers were members of the CMIA, thus strengthening its structure as a key component for the programming of production.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast, greater innovation was seen in the organization of fashion parades.<sup>71</sup> These saw experimentation with new formulae aimed at going beyond the established format of simple collective catwalks, focusing instead on the transformation of every event—starting with the choice of location—into a genuine show. This was the case, for example, for a range of events named *Moda Industria* (Fashion and Industry), which were staged in 1961 in the futuristic Pirelli skyscraper in Milan.<sup>72</sup> The schedule included alternate cinema screenings and shows featuring professional performers and genuine catwalk shows, based upon a range of set designs, each dedicated to different moments and aspects of everyday life. At the same time, large color close-ups

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common work on aesthetic content (new colors and lines). According to Pouillard (“Managing Fashion Creativity,” 87), the best way to manage fashion creativity was to create conditions for creativity to flourish, but to leave discussion on aesthetic content aside.

68. To further examine the fashion press in general, see Carrarini, “La stampa di moda dall’Unità a oggi.” On the most important magazines of the years 1950–1980, see also Bottero, *Nostra signora la moda*, 111–116.

69. E.g., see Blaszczyk, *Imagining Consumers*.

70. Capalbi, “Al 17° Samia novità ed incontri.”

71. For a filmed contribution on the shows organized by the CMIA, see “Milano: sfilata di moda”, film no. C1844, February 1968, Istituto Luce Historical Archive.

72. Opened the year before, the Pirellone was an architectural project that eloquently represented the economic rebirth of Italy; it is still considered to be one of the symbols of the “economic miracle” (see Cevini, *Grattacielo Pirelli*).

focused on the characteristics and qualities of the clothes and materials used.<sup>73</sup> In this way it was possible to both entertain workers in the industry while showing and describing in detail an extremely large number of garments. This was a first, and in certain aspects it was a forerunner of the Milan catwalks in the 1970s, where art, graphics, photography, and, in more general terms, the show became tools for fashion, helping transform the capital of Lombardy into one of fashion's global centers.

### From Planning to Coordination: The Need to "Create a System" and the Failure of the AIA

The sources available do not allow us to evaluate the real impact of these last initiatives. The press was certainly a useful informative system (and the CMIA used it widely), but it is not possible to fully evaluate the contribution made in the pursuit of the objectives of the CMIA. It is even more difficult to estimate the impact of the many events directly organized by the CMIA. Participation in specialist markets such as SAMIA, even if done with the support of the CMIA, was probably more useful for the promotion of individual companies rather than being effective in pursuit of CMIA's main aims.

Nevertheless, with regard to the ability to influence the choices made by the public, it is possible to make some additional observations. Knowing the factors that had the most influence on consumers was important not only at a more general level, to promote seasonal materials and colors, but also at an individual company level, to identify reference markets and fine-tune the entire production cycle, including distribution and promotional strategies. By the middle of the 1960s the press and catwalks were two influential, but not unique, tools and, for some categories of consumers, not the most important. If some studies showed how fashion played an ever more important role in influencing purchasing decisions, it also emerged that these trends were most influential among women and the young, who viewed fashion as much more than a simple question of dress. If the street was the main source of information for those whose interest in fashion was marginal, the priority for others was consulting the press (but not the specialized publications where the CMIA invested) followed by television, shop windows, fashion shows, and the choices made by VIPs. Consumers also turned to advertisements as a source of information concerning fashion, but when choosing what to buy, what they saw in the shop

73. "Una manifestazione di Moda Industria"; "La manifestazione di *Moda Industria*"; "Moda Industria"; "*Moda Industria* per l'autunno-inverno."

windows was more influential than what they saw in the press and at fashion shows.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, while consumers turned to magazines to keep up-to-date, they looked in the shops before buying, a guarantee of fashion that was not just advertised, but was actually being worn.<sup>75</sup> This situation manifested itself most obviously in the second part of the decade, as shown by new important market research.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the actions of the CMIA confirmed the difficulty it had in fully understanding the consequences that the profound economic and social changes during this period would have on every aspect of the fashion industry.

Notwithstanding some positive results, by the end of the 1960s, the CMIA came to understand that it was necessary to go beyond a strategy of mere planning. The many variables in play required greater coordination for the ready-to-wear industry: upstream, with the creative phase, and downstream, with distribution.<sup>77</sup> The real, new challenge faced by the CMIA was that of “creating a system.” Nevertheless, the AIIA was committing another, more serious error of judgment. In fact, the work of the AIIA, also in collaboration with other Italian fashion institutions such as the CNMI, reflected the idea of a fashion system that was hierarchical in terms of creation (with the most important couturiers at the top), while dualistic with regard to the structure of production and the reference markets (tailoring on one side and large-scale industry for the mass market on the other). This was an idea that was overtaken by the reality of facts, but which drove the CMIA and other fashion institutions, both prisoners of the same vision of the situation, to pursue general sectorial agreements.<sup>78</sup> It is impossible to exclude the influence of the EIM, which supervised the activity of the AIIA and financed the CMIA precisely with the specific aim of creating coordination between high fashion and industry at a sectorial level.<sup>79</sup> But the main question to answer is the following: How was it possible for two sectors that had thrived throughout the previous decade, each confined to its own market segment, to work together in a systematic manner? If we exclude the relationship between Biki (a famous couturier) and the ready-to-wear firm GFT, or the particular entrepreneurial initiatives directly undertaken by some prestigious high-fashion houses such as Sorelle Fontana, the relationship between high fashion and industry

74. On this topic, see Morris, “Le vetrine della moda.”

75. See Paris, “Moda e programmazione industriale,” 224–227.

76. E.g., Forte et al., *Il consumatore e la moda*. It should be remembered that the tools of market and consumer research were new in Europe, even more so in Italy (see Schwarzkopf, “Managing the Unmanageable”).

77. “Comitato moda degli industriali.”

78. “V Congresso Nazionale”; “Al 5° Congresso di Firenze”; Rasi, “Il IV Congresso degli Industriali dell’abbigliamento.”

79. “La riunione del Comitato Generale”; “Le conferme di Torino.”

was limited in Italy (above all in comparison with other countries such as France). Therefore it is no surprise that every attempt to implement these plans failed, as each party viewed collaboration as a risk to its autonomy, as well as to its profits.

The Alta Moda-Industria agreement (high fashion–ready to wear agreement), signed in 1971 by the EIM, the CNMI, the AIIA, and the union representatives of the textile industry and producers of artificial and synthetic fibers, is emblematic of this situation. Despite the satisfaction of national institutions (starting with the ministries with direct connections to the fashion sectors) and the supportive behavior of most of the specialist press (perhaps also exasperated by over a decade of failed attempts and an increasingly serious crisis in the larger companies),<sup>80</sup> and after a failed season of fashion planning, the agreement also signaled the end of a somewhat disastrous phase of general coordination.<sup>81</sup> Collaboration was undoubtedly more profitable than planning, and coordination between the various components of Italian fashion was necessary, but had to be done at the level of the individual company and not with sector-wide agreements imposed from above and therefore difficult to implement at the level of the single producer.<sup>82</sup> There were too many variables to take into account when planning the production cycle effectively. Each company had to take into account all of these factors in order to best adapt them to its own situation and independently find its ideal position within the market, fitting its structure to the most suitable market strategy. In this new context, the role of the various BIAs also would have to be reconsidered.

The failure of the agreement opened the field to those companies that, unlike their larger counterparts, independently developed the correct relationship between creation, production and distribution. It is no surprise, then, that as the 1960s ended and the 1970s began, a series of SMEs emerged that were able to skillfully combine the

80. E.g., see Ricca, “Coordinamento economico”; Soli, “La moda durerà di più”; Massai, “Finalmente d’accordo.”

81. On the issue of coordination failure, there is a wide literature that provides theoretical support to this interpretation. For an overview, see Moretti and Zirpoli, “A Dynamic Theory of Network Failure.”

82. The agreement provided for collaboration between the textile industry, the ready-to-wear apparel industry, and high-fashion tailors to meet four objectives: the industrial production of garments while respecting the lines of high fashion; prolonging the life of a fashion idea; simplifying production planning; better protection for distributors from the risk of unsold stock. This was an agreement requested from the top. As a consequence, this could not represent the start of a new path, but the end of the aspiration of high-fashion tailors and companies producing ready-to-wear apparel on a large scale to cover the wide market sector consisting of consumers who were no longer solely interested in good quality–price relationships. The complete text of the agreement and the main comments of the press are detailed in “Coordinamento.”

constraints of mass production with the tastes of the consumer and the increasingly rapid changes in fashion, because they were more flexible. As has been explained, the need of ready-to-wear companies to control the creative phase was a consequence of the constraints of the production structure. For technological and organizational reasons, these smaller and more flexible companies were able to benefit from a cost structure that even allowed them to produce small collections efficiently. In this way it was possible to tighten the production cycle and reduce lead times, accumulating less stock and adapting to market variations with increased agility. Moreover, these businesses were also more attentive to the actual requirements of the market, and for this reason focused in particular on the young, who represented the most important, dynamic consumers. These were the firms that, before others, started to collaborate ever more closely with young designers who worked with their own age group in mind (thus fully capturing tastes and needs), selling their small collections in exclusive dedicated shops (boutiques) that changed their stock on an almost weekly basis.<sup>83</sup> This was a clear expression of a new way of viewing and organizing the entire clothing industry.

These companies were the new avant-garde of the sector, and at the beginning of the 1970s the AIIA was fully aware of this. In fact, it was the management of the association who underlined how the AIIA itself and the CMIA included many of the most important producers in the Italian clothing industry, but not those of small or medium size, which because of their ever increasing ability to influence the market, were already considered pivotal for the entire sector. The reason for this absence was well known and explained by the same managers of the association, who considered these new realities to be dangerous for those larger companies that could not manage to achieve equally short production cycles.<sup>84</sup> The AIIA, therefore, implicitly stated it represented just a group of companies—those in the most difficulty. Those large firms went bankrupt during the 1960s and the early 1970s due to a technical–organizational structure that, despite being key to success in the previous decades, was already too rigid, making it unable to adapt to the rapid changes in the market.

Despite the increase in membership, the AIIA's ability to represent those members, which had been its strength since its foundation, when the large clothing manufacturers that supplied the mass market drove the sector, was drastically reduced by the end of the 1960s. Therefore,

83. For an overview of the boutique see Chevalier, "La boutique des années 1960"; Fogg, *Boutique*.

84. Piccoli, "Incontro con i protagonisti," November 1970, December 1970, May 1971, August 1971.

the AIIA's failure was twofold: it was unable to attract the smaller and more dynamic businesses (or maybe, as we have seen earlier, it had no intention to do so), while at the same time it was incapable of protecting the interests of large companies.<sup>85</sup> There were two closely connected reasons for this failure, which can be traced back to interlinked economic, social, technical, and organizational variables. The first was the lack of organizational flexibility, which left the reins of the AIIA in the hands of the larger companies and their owners, some of whom were founder members (such as Francesco Dell'Orto, Riccardo Molteni, Fernando Petrella, and Alberto Fumagalli).<sup>86</sup> An (unconscious?) symbol of this rigidity was precisely one of those founders, Giulio Goehring (1890–1973), the owner of Fabbrica Italiana Biancheria in Milan (a member of the bureau of the Assolombarda from 1946 to 1971<sup>87</sup> and a member of Parliament for the Liberal Party from 1963 to 1967).<sup>88</sup> For twenty-eight long years (1945–1973) Goehring held the position of president, which allowed him to control the steering and management bodies such as the Consiglio Direttivo (Board of Management) and the Giunta Esecutiva (Executive Committee), as well as representing the AIIA and maintaining relations in the name of the same with third parties in all circumstances. Some influential studies from the start of the 1970s support this hypothesis. These studies highlight how the opinion of the members regarding BIAs was largely negative. This situation was not limited to the fashion industry. During

85. On the position and the related agenda of business history regarding the analysis of business failure, see Fridenson, "Business Failure," 567–578. On a potential typology of failure, see Van Rooij, "Sisyphus in Business."

86. For a full list of the members of the main management bodies of the AIIA at the end of the 1960s, see "Associazione italiana industriali dell'abbigliamento." According to scholars such as Popp, who have studied creative industries, small firms are particularly resistant to appeals for unity (Popp, "An Indissoluble Mutual Destiny," 1846–1847). This could indirectly explain the predominant role of large companies in the governance of the AIIA. Unfortunately, the lack of archival sources impeded the detailed reconstruction of membership trends in terms of size and rates of entry and exit. However, we can certainly say that the ready-to-wear industry was largely composed of small and medium-sized enterprises. A situation that was well known to the president, Giulio Goehring, who was aware of the "pulverization" of the clothing sector at the end of the 1960s (approximately 3,600 firms and more than 200,000 workers; "Le associazioni ci informano"). Although the average size had gradually increased after World War II, at the beginning of the 1970s more than 55 percent of workers were still employed in small enterprises with fewer than 50 laborers—this percentage was higher than the average for the Italian manufacturing sector (Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, *Il Sistema imprenditoriale*, 4, 118).

87. The Assolombarda (Lombard Industrial Association) is the Milanese industrial association (<http://www.assolombarda.it/chi-siamo/storia/comitati-di-presidenza>).

88. Parlamento Italiano, Camera dei deputati, Portale Storico (<http://storia.camera.it/deputato/giulio-goehring-18900921>).

those years, the role of trade associations was under close scrutiny, starting with Confindustria, the association that was the largest representative of the Italian economic establishment.<sup>89</sup> In the ready-to-wear sector, however, the level of dissatisfaction was among the highest in the fashion industry (greater than 70 percent of those questioned). For more than a third of those sampled, the main reason for this disappointment was the fact that the BIAs were controlled by just a few members. Furthermore, more than half of those interviewed pointed out that the BIAs, in a fast-changing context, were no longer able to provide adequate guidance on the main industrial policy problems, while at the same time complaining (around 20 percent) of a lack of essential services.<sup>90</sup>

The second reason behind AIIA's failure was the lack of comprehension of the economic and social changes underway (as mentioned earlier), which the larger companies could have dealt with and overcome had they been properly guided by the AIIA. In fact, the failure of historic companies such as Rosier, Hettemarks, and Unimac did not signal the end of large-scale clothing manufacturers, which gradually started to recover at the end of the 1970s. This was, however, a different industry, with companies characterized by a new technical–organizational structure that was able to create advantageous ties with those fashion designers (the so-called stylists) who were able to operate with more companies, managing all the phases of the production process, and proposing for each a clearly distinguishable style aimed at a different market segment.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, it was the stylist who succeeded where the AIIA and CMIA had failed, constructing a new and internationally competitive Italian fashion system and taming the phenomenon known as fashion, a challenge that severely tested the structural rigidity of the large clothing manufacturers but also opened the way for a new phase of development in the sector.<sup>92</sup>

According to that same AIIA, the AEIA Congress in Venice (1975) was the end of an era: the AIIA was no longer able to protect the interests

89. At the end of the 1960s and the start of the 1970s, Confindustria was subject to reform that aimed at the construction of wider relations based on pluralism and dialogue with political powers and trade and labor associations. A system that, while distinguishing between their respective roles, could better contribute to the modernization of the country. Castronovo, *Cento anni di imprese*, 450–455, 465–467.

90. There was, however, no lack of self-criticism. Just over 40 percent of those questioned pointed out that the reluctance of some entrepreneurs and businesspeople to engage in open dialogue with other associates was a serious problem (Ciabattini, *Il sistema moda*, 70–81).

91. One of the first examples of these new designers was Walter Albini. See Frisa and Tonchi, *Walter Albini and His Times*.

92. Paris, "Fashion as a System," 545–551.

of an industry that had seen not just several notable failures but also the closure of important specialist markets such as SAMIA and Mercato Internazionale del Tessile per l'Abbigliamento e l'Arredamento (MITAM, International Textile Market for Clothing and Furnishing)<sup>93</sup> and the disappearance of many institutions, including the EIM. Although more than a hundred new members joined the AIIA from 1969 to 1970, their participation in association life was limited to benefiting from the few services still being offered.<sup>94</sup> The unification of negotiations for the renewal of national collective employment agreements was presented as the best opportunity to set up, together with another six associations in the sector, another body: Federtessile (Federation Between the Associations of the Textile and Clothing Industries, 1975).<sup>95</sup> This was a trade association that aimed to reunite, coordinate, protect, and promote the interests of all of the companies in the various parts of the textile and clothing production cycle.<sup>96</sup> This was a sign of the permanent passing of a way of viewing the fashion industry that, also at an institutional level, made space for a reality better suited to govern the sector with systematic logic. Federtessile, therefore, was a BIA founded as a new combination of preexisting associations that shared elements of cultural and economic affinity. The expanding Italian fashion system, partly represented by Federtessile, was not only an important cultural industry, but also one of the most economically relevant sectors of Italian industry—with increasing competition in the international market. Competition that, starting from the 1970s, was increasingly being played out in a context within which globalization and the third industrial revolution—the so-called information revolution—would also require a new approach and new organization on the part of the BIAs.<sup>97</sup>

93. MITAM of Milan was founded in the second half of the 1950s to facilitate cooperation between the textile and clothing industries. It quickly became one of the most significant international appointments in the textile sector, contributing to the qualitative growth of domestic production, also through collaborations with the world of high fashion.

94. Piccoli, "Incontro con i protagonisti" (November 1970).

95. Sistema Moda Italia (<http://www.sistemamodaitalia.com/it/federazione/la-storia>).

96. AIIA, *Cento domande, una sola risposta: Associazione Italiana Industriali Abbigliamento* (p. 4), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive; AIIA, *Quarant'anni di abbigliamento* (p. 14), Biblioteca Tremelloni del Tessile e della Moda Historical Archive.

97. On this topic see Galambos, "Recasting the Organizational Synthesis"; Fernández Perez and Puig, "Global Lobbies for Global Economy." For a critical insight into the history of Italian ready-to-wear from the 1970s onward, see Merlo, "Italian Fashion Business."



## Conclusions

Although the role that the institutions—including bodies and organizations, especially when they go beyond the goals of the organization and the mere interests of its members—played in influencing economic growth is widely acknowledged, great difficulty still exists in demonstrating how much this performance is connected to a particular institutional configuration. This article does not solve this problem insofar as it does not “measure” the role of the organizations studied.<sup>98</sup> However, recent studies have confirmed how a qualitative and interpretative approach could prove useful, as long as, based on rigorous empirical analysis and with a long-term perspective, it takes into account all of the activities of an institution (or an organization) and its interactions with the surrounding environment.<sup>99</sup> This is exactly what this study has tried to achieve.

The historical–economic literature has highlighted how the functions of the BIAs were essentially to promote common values and construct a network of relations, to give the entrepreneurial community a platform for discussion, to supply information and services for members and to lobby on behalf of the interests of a sector. It has emerged from this study that the AIIA did not avoid these obligations—and with good results—giving the ready-to-wear industry a strong, respected voice in an institutional, social, industrial, and economic context that was changing fast. The willingness to set up an association that was highly inclusive, designed to meet requests and represent the interests of all companies in the sector, regardless of their size, geographical location, and product specialization, led to the foundation of an organizational structure that was functional for the pursuit of its statutory objectives. A structure that, for a long time, was efficient in the governance of internal conflicts as well as relations with other trade associations. At the same time, the AIIA also offered a vast range of market-complementing and market-supporting activities, which incentivized cooperation between companies and therefore reinforced and consolidated the role of the AIIA both inside and outside national borders. The constant increase in members, including firms operating outside the ready-to-wear sector, is the most obvious proof of the value of the services offered and, in more general terms, the efficacy of its actions.

Nevertheless, the brief life of the AIIA is a clear signal of how something had changed radically and rapidly. This happened principally when the AIIA tried to expand its political, social, and economic role, going beyond the previously listed functions—an aspect that was,

98. On this topic, see also Voigt, “How (Not) to Measure.”

99. Decker et al., “New Business Histories!”

however, nothing new for many BIAs created during the twentieth century. This phase of the life of the AIIA brings us to the second objective of this research, that is, to verify exactly what was accomplished toward the creation of a efficient and internationally competitive fashion system that was also advantageous for the whole national economy. In this case the result was not positive, for reasons which were not wholly attributable to the actions of the AIIA. For example, the complicated and confused institutional situation, which saw, as well as numerous BIAs, the presence of many bodies and organizations all involved in representing, protecting, and promoting Italian fashion, should not be forgotten. During the 1960s, however, it was the ready-to-wear industry, represented by AIIA, that more than any other needed a reorganization of the Italian fashion industry. And the larger and less flexible companies were particularly in need of such. Those companies, in fact, were heavily affected by the consequences of “fashion,” a phenomenon that was certainly not new, but profoundly different compared with the previous decade, as it reflected a totally transformed economic and social context. The choice made by the AIIA was to reduce the level of risk to companies arising from the extreme volatility of fashion trends by simply delegating the role of defining those trends to external subjects—the so-called fashion councils, such as the CMIA. As has been explained, this choice proved to be unsuccessful. This was certainly a solution that compensated for important shortcomings in the production process of large companies, such as the lack of a creative phase that was able to adapt to the new context (or at least lessened the tensions between management and creativity). However, this choice demonstrated at the same time how the AIIA had not fully understood the nature of the fashion phenomenon, its new economic and social basis, and the profound changes in the demand for clothing that it caused. This occurred because the AIIA, in particular starting from the second half of the 1960s, no longer represented the cutting edge of the sector, which was made up of small and medium-sized firms that were able to combine the production constraints of the mass market with the tastes of the public and the ever more rapid variation of fashion (a phenomenon that was difficult to “institutionalize”—namely, to organize and regulate according to stable rules). These companies, in fact, were intentionally kept outside the AIIA, as they were thought to disturb the actions of large companies, the *deus ex machina* of the association.

In conclusion, we can affirm how the changes in cultural, social, economic, and technological conditions that characterized the textile and clothing market during the 1960s had a major impact on both the utility and the performance of the AIIA. In short, the AIIA was no longer representative of those whom it was meant to represent (the cutting

edge of the ready-to-wear sector) and was inevitably destined to disappear. The need to create a system and the lack of independent room to maneuver and earn a profit for the various players in the world of fashion made many trade associations superfluous and led to the inevitable creation of a new association—Federtessile—in a completely new context, to reunite, coordinate, protect, and promote the interests of all companies operating in the various areas of the textile and clothing industry in Italy.

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