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Place-Making the Local to Reach the Global: A Case Study of Pre-Helsinki

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Abstract

The case of Pre-Helsinki, a designer-driven platform aiming at internationalizing Finnish fashion talents, illustrates how fashion designers through this platform mobilize local actors in reshaping Finnish fashion to increase its visibility at the international level. For this inquiry, the article develops the concept of place-making, which summarizes the collective efforts of fashion designers and other local actors in the internationalization of Finnish fashion. Place-making comprises three themes, including a dynamic and consolidated interplay among the local actors, economic and symbolic contributions of the actors to local development,

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and its implementation at multiple scales from neighborhood to city and nation. The data for analysis consist of semi-structured interviews with actors around the case and ethnographic observations. The research shows how Pre-Helsinki appeared as a reaction to local- and global-level disconnections in Finnish fashion and how these disconnections were addressed in its activities. The background, origin of the platform, its activities and main actors are discussed in the context of how the platform implements place-making and contributes to building a meaning of Helsinki and Finland as places of fashion. In conclusion, the case is explored in the broader development of the Finnish fashion ecosystem.

KEYWORDS: place-making, fashion design, Finnish fashion, Nordic fashion

Introduction: Up-and-Coming Finnish Fashion

From a spatial perspective, the polycentric model of global fashion has been discussed recently as an alternative to the classic center-periphery model (Skov 2011). While such cities as Paris, London, Milan, and New York hold the title of “fashion capitals,” emerging places, for instance, Copenhagen in Denmark and Stockholm in Sweden from the Nordic region, have been more oriented to “international validation” and sought to be included in “macro-level transnational dynamics” (Skov 2011, 139). These emergent locations strive to become known as places of fashion.

These attempts of Nordic countries to gain recognition in global fashion have been acknowledged and analyzed in scholarly literature. Studies on Danish fashion, for instance, have introduced how the country developed the local fashion scene while embracing the national identity to communicate on the global scale (Riegels Melchior 2010, 2011; Riegels Melchior, Skov, and Csaba 2011). Several studies on Swedish fashion stressed the notion of place and its relationship with local fashion firms (Hauge, Malmberg, and Power 2009; Hauge 2012). These studies explored how “high-cost” countries, including Sweden, can retain a sizeable presence in global fashion and how localized resources, including knowledge and networks, allow the fashion companies to keep their home base in the country (Hauge, Malmberg, and Power 2009).

More recently, another Nordic country, Finland, has been actively involved in the process of establishing itself in the global fashion landscape (Pöppönen 2016). These efforts can be seen in the international recognition of young Finnish fashion designers awarded prizes in prestigious competitions, including Hyères International Festival of Fashion and Photography¹ and the LVMH prize² (Pöppönen 2016; Voight 2016). Accolades of Finnish fashion designers abound in the international media, including *Vogue Italia*, and Finnish brands, including Samuji and Makia Clothing, are gradually expanding abroad. Overall, these activities show that this international recognition rather refers to

artistic fashion than commercial brands, which is the case of Denmark and Sweden. Therefore, the recent development of Finnish fashion is often compared to the Belgian fashion phenomenon (see Grayson 2013; Moreno 2015; Pechman 2016), which gained a reputation from the “Antwerp Six”³, an avant-garde group of Belgian designers in the 1980s (Gimeno-Martínez 2007, 2011; Teunissen 2011).

However, Finland, being a “second-tier region” in fashion (Skov 2011), has rarely attracted scholarly attention (exceptions include Gurova and Morozova 2016; Chun, Gurova, and Niinimäki 2017, McNeil 2017).⁴ This attention is needed because it can not only shed light on yet another Nordic case, but also exemplify how fashion designers have been able to mobilize local actors through a designer-driven platform that they created to increase the international recognition of Finnish fashion and to push the whole ecosystem of Finnish fashion forward. To examine this development, we employ the concept of place-making, summarizing it as collective efforts of local actors to position an emerging “fashion nation” (Riegels Melchior 2011) on the global stage.

Scholars have agreed that Finland has established its reputation as a “design nation” (Riegels Melchior 2011; Skov 2011) alongside neighboring Nordic countries. From traditions in the applied arts, the country has introduced iconic designs since its golden age of design in the 1950s and 1960s (Korvenmaa 2010; Hohti 2011). Finland became a meaningful place for design through continuous recognition at international fairs in Paris, Milan, and New York (Davies 2002). Despite not being clearly positioned globally as a fashion nation, for many years, Finnish fashion has been described as “up-and-coming” (see Szmydke and Folcher 2013; Petersen 2015; Sjöroos 2016). But for how long can this description be applied? Helsinki, the capital of Finland, is still a novel name in fashion compared to other nearby cities, such as Stockholm and Copenhagen. Particularly from a business perspective, several reports noted how Finnish fashion companies and brands struggle to reach international markets (Lille 2010; Van Eynde and Wiinamäki 2012). These studies commonly recognized the necessity of remodeling the Finnish fashion ecosystem to support the striving local fashion business.

To overcome this struggle, the Helsinki fashion scene has presented a joint effort, organizing an initiative that represents a set of activities collectively. In 2012, both fashion designers and business experts from Finland initiated a unique platform known as Pre-Helsinki (Chun, Gurova, and Niinimäki 2017). This platform differs from other fashion weeks that hold periodic fashion shows of several labels. Instead, it is a designer-centered and designer-driven platform aiming at internationalizing young Finnish fashion talents. As designers have been involved in both its organization and their promotion through the platform, it is a timely case to demonstrate how this platform contributes to creating meaning for Helsinki and Finland as places for fashion. We argue that this platform exemplifies how Finnish fashion actors have been seeking

a distinctive path with the emphasized role of fashion designers while increasing international visibility of Finnish fashion. Comparing to the previously mentioned examples from Sweden and Denmark, where mobilization of the local actors in their attempts to promote and internationalize fashion was facilitated by the Swedish Fashion Council and the Danish Fashion Institute respectively, Finland lacks such an organization. To some extent, Finnish Fashion and Textile (*Suomen Tekstiili ja Muoti* in Finnish) is an organization representing Finnish fashion locally and globally. However, it provides services exclusively for its members who are mainly established companies rather than startups. It also focuses primarily on supporting commercial brands instead of artistic fashion. Therefore, Pre-Helsinki initially has taken this niche—to globally promote young Finnish fashion designers who have already gained international recognition; thus they are capable of attracting the attention of international media and eventually can become part of the global business of fashion.

According to previous studies (Rantisi 2011; Skov 2011; McRobbie 2015), place-making emphasizes dynamic interactions amongst local actors in the process of building a meaning of place, for instance, a city as fashion city and a country as fashion nation. During this process, the central role is played by designers to mobilize the efforts of other local actors, such as policy makers and local businesses. Thus, this study aims at exploring the ways in which Pre-Helsinki has implemented place-making. Therefore, our goal is neither to define what the Finnish fashion identity is nor to unpack the modern history of Finnish fashion, but rather to utilize Pre-Helsinki as a case study to view the progression of the Finnish fashion ecosystem and to trace how it has catalyzed local development, achieving international recognition through consolidated collaborative actions.

Theoretical Foundations: Place-Making and Fashion Designers

The relationship between fashion and place has been examined through different lenses, including how fashion education and policy shape place, what particular styles are linked to certain places, and what the role of production and consumption is in place development (e.g., McRobbie 1998; Skov 2001; Niessen, Leshkovich and Jones 2003; Crewe 2017). Among the many possibilities to connect fashion with the notion of place, this article pays special attention to the meaning-making perspective of fashion design.

Place-making, the key concept of this article, is borrowed from the study by Skov (2011). Expanding from her earlier studies on fashion in East Asian contexts, including Japan and Hong Kong (Skov 2001, 2003), Skov examined industrial, cultural, and governmental issues in the evolution of local fashion scenes in Europe. She argued that recently global fast fashion companies have taken the role of dressing the nation from

fashion designers and questioned: “what do fashion designers produce that is significant for the nation?” (2011, 150). To highlight the impact of fashion design in a spatial dimension, she introduced the notion of place-making ability that “fills a cosmopolitan form with local content through displays and events associated with a heightened sense of here-and-now” (2011, 138). According to her study, the ability is connected with a particular territory as it helps boost the local culture and economy. In particular, the role of young fashion designers is stressed in local development due to their active involvement in place-making.

Rantisi (2011) differentiated the place-making ability of fashion design from place-marketing (or place-branding). In place-making, she stressed the importance of dynamic interaction and coordination among actors in the local fashion industry beyond “localized capabilities,” and the presence of key local industry activities, such as revisiting traditional techniques, production, design, marketing, and distribution. By reconnecting these existing capabilities, place-making ability can channel diverse supports to generate regional transformation through fashion design. However, according to Rantisi (2011), place-marketing is mostly conducted through top-down and hierarchical governmental policy restricting the bottom-up development of local fashion dynamics. This distinction between top-down and bottom-up approaches can be traced to her previous study on Montreal fashion where the interaction between fashion designers and cultural intermediaries, including showrooms and buyers, was investigated (Rantisi 2010).

In comparison to these studies on place-making, Segre Reinach (2011) paid more attention to international recognition of national identity in fashion. She stressed the strong influence of fashion design in the creation of a new regional identity, in a similar way as in place-marketing (Rantisi 2011). The “catwalk economy” of fashion allows countries to be involved in the exchange of various matters from business to culture through carefully choreographed and refined presentation of novelty (Löfgren and Willim 2005). Thus, Reinach cautioned against overlooking the impact of fashion design in building national identity.

Development trajectories of fashion in Scandinavian countries, including Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, were introduced by Riegels Melchior (2011) as additional examples of government-driven branding efforts of small nations. By comparing their approaches, she illustrated the attempts of three countries to transform their images from design nations to fashion nations. Strong partnerships between governments and local fashion actors have contributed to the renewal of their national identity to be more attractive and forward-looking in order to be accepted in the global dialog of fashion.

More recently, a study investigating the place-making ability of fashion design focused on a smaller scale of a neighborhood rather than the national level. From a set of studies investigating urban creative professionals in different contexts, McRobbie (2015) introduced a case of Berlin-

based fashion designers as another example of place-making ability. She argued that Berlin tends to have less commercial and more artistic preferences in terms of fashion. As a reinterpretation of this tendency, a number of female fashion designers have demonstrated place-making from non-industrialized firms in a small area. Throughout their independently developed and socially engaging local stores, those designers acted as activists to construct a new movement to support female employment and economic independence in a particular neighborhood in Berlin.

Based on these studies, three themes of place-making were identified. The first theme is the involvement of diverse actors in the implementation of place-making, including young designers, local fashion stakeholders, and governmental organizations. This involvement can embrace many types of support, including finance, media, facility, and personal networks. The studies by Skov (2011) and McRobbie (2015) highlighted the active role of young fashion designers in place-making, although a dynamic interplay of stakeholders in the local fashion scene was also commonly recognized as an essential element. The supportive role that governmental organizations have to play was also suggested by Rantisi (2011) and enforced by Riegels Melchior (2011) to maximize the place-making ability of fashion designers. The second theme is how fashion design can contribute symbolically and economically to the development and international recognition of a place. All previous studies emphasized this contribution of fashion beyond the conventional approach of simply dressing the public. The third theme is the scale of place-making, which ranges from the scale of a neighborhood to that of a nation. Whilst earlier studies discussed the relationship between place and fashion at the level of city and nation (Rantisi 2011; Riegels Melchior 2011; Segre Reinach 2011; Skov 2011), McRobbie (2015) investigated it in a neighborhood of Berlin. Therefore, in this study, we conceptualize place-making as the ability of fashion design, based on collaborative efforts of diverse local actors, to contribute to the development of a local fashion scene while creating a meaning of place, from nation to neighbourhood, to be recognized in the global context.

In the following section, we introduce the research methods, including approaches for data collection and interpretation. The three themes of place-making will be further discussed in the findings. After discussing challenges and possibilities of future development for the platform, this article concludes with implications of the case.

Research Methods

This investigation on the single case of Pre-Helsinki aims to answer two questions: (1) Why did the Finnish fashion scene produce Pre-Helsinki? And (2) how has the platform contributed to developing the local fashion scene and to creating meanings of Helsinki and Finland as places of fashion? For this inquiry, adopting the basic principle of case study that suggests employing multiple sources of evidence (Yin 2013), two

qualitative research methods were employed, namely semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation, in order to generate the main data set.

Throughout purposive sampling (Flick 1998), interviewees were selected by the criteria of their involvement in Pre-Helsinki and also suggestions from its co-founders. Twelve interviews were conducted with co-founders, organizers currently working for the platform (creative director, branding director, PR/marketing director, among others), experts from both the local fashion school and industry (educators, consultants, and prominent designers), fashion designers who have participated in Pre-Helsinki programs and external partners (local collaborators including a ministry representative). In this study, the interviewees were not anonymized as agreed in advance (see Appendix 1 for the interviewee list).

The interviews were planned to identify key aspects of the case. Prior to each interview, secondary data sources, including news media, websites, and social media, were viewed to understand the background of the interviewee and to construct relevant questions. Additionally, several topics were discussed with every interviewee. These topics included personal opinions about the Finland/Helsinki fashion scene, his/her relationship with the platform and its future scenarios. Diverse opinions involving varying expertise and experience helped constitute a holistic and objective view of the case.

In addition to the interviews, ethnographic observations were made during the Pre-Helsinki program in 2016 from May 20 to 28. The entire program was followed and documented through field notes and photographs. Its format of events varied from exhibition, fashion show, showcase, pop-up store opening, workshop to party (see Appendix 2 for the observed program).

Furthermore, mediated data about the platform were collected throughout the 2016 program. The spectrum of this data includes texts and visual materials from official communication channels of Pre-Helsinki 2016, such as brochures, website,⁵ and social media.⁶ Several news articles and blog posts about the platform were also added. However, these materials were only used as supportive information for this study.

The recorded interviews were transcribed and combined with field notes from the observation as the main dataset. For its analytic process, theoretical thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) was employed to compare results between previous studies on the place-making ability of fashion design and the case of Pre-Helsinki. This approach was useful, as this study first identified the main themes of place-making, then further identified key aspects of the case through the review of the dataset. Atlas.ti software was used to digitize and organize the data, and the transcribed interviews and field notes were reviewed repeatedly to refine descriptions of the case-specific aspects. Validity of the insights was assured via triangulation of the investigators' interpretations and

evidence (Denzin 1978). After identifying main findings, the authors of this study organized a series of discussions to further elaborate the themes related to place-making. In iteration, the findings were further revised to present a concise illustration of the case, demonstrating the complex nature of place-making via fashion design.

Findings: Past and Present of Pre-Helsinki

In order to empirically investigate why Pre-Helsinki emerged and the ways in which the platform has influenced the development of the local fashion scene, it is imperative to unpack key aspects of the case. Thus, this section will provide the following findings related to Pre-Helsinki, namely, background, origin, activities of the platform, and main actors. This section begins with the recognition of two disconnections that existed in Finnish fashion and presents two solutions that the co-founders of Pre-Helsinki utilized to overcome these disconnections. Two approaches implementing the solutions will be described, and the three main groups of actors (organizers, designers, and external partners) are then introduced. Regarding the themes, an articulated explanation from the data analysis is presented first, then the relevant themes of place-making are discussed. Altogether, the case of Pre-Helsinki functions as a window to view the ways in which it has constructed the meaning for Helsinki and Finland as places of fashion internationally.

Background: two disconnections in Finnish fashion

As mentioned above, Finnish fashion has recently experienced success in certain areas, especially through international fashion design competitions, where the artistic side was particularly noted. However, until the 2010s, one of the major issues—the global recognition of Finnish fashion—was not fully resolved. In this article, we argue that two disconnections prevented it: (1) domestic level disconnection between the design and business sides of Finnish fashion, and (2) an international level disconnection between the Finnish fashion scene and the rest of the fashion world. These disconnections were the drivers behind the emergence of Pre-Helsinki.

The first disconnection arose from the domestic level, especially the business side of Finnish fashion. Based on the data, several gaps influencing this issue were observed from education to business. Regarding the educational side, university level courses on fashion marketing and branding are recent in Finland, and it is still challenging for fashion design students to apply abstract knowledge to the practice of everyday business. In an interview, business expert and educator Pekka Mattila noted that “we have relatively developed the fashion design discipline. It is getting stronger constantly if we look at the international standard. But we did not have many commercial people, business studies or business educators” (interview, March 15, 2016). On the business side, large

numbers of fashion designers in Finland are self-employed (Lille 2010; Van Eynde and Wiinamäki 2012) and struggle for many reasons: lack of financial resources and skills to manage a business and difficulties to build a team and to delegate tasks. Mattila commented on this: “they [Finnish fashion designers] want to retain control 100% even if giving some of the control away would give some necessary resources for scaling up” (interview, March 15, 2016). However, prominent designer and fashion educator Tuomas Laitinen noted: “we don't need just designers but business people with fashion thinking” (interview, March 15, 2016). While training fashion designers to be business-minded was proposed, a more significant issue was identified in the lack of fashion-friendly business expertise that can maximize the potential of Finnish fashion designers.

Until recently, the disconnection between the Finnish fashion scene and the broader context was observable. Domestic events, including the Gloria Fashion Show⁷ and Helsinki Design Week,⁸ have been organized aiming at promoting fashion collections of local designers. However, these events have been either channeled mostly toward the local press or focused on the broader design sector instead of specialized in fashion. The small domestic market restricted Finnish fashion entrepreneurs to grow internationally with limited local supports (Lille 2010; Van Eynde and Wiinamäki 2012). Moreover, in the interview, Laitinen commented that the Finnish fashion scene lost touch with the mainstream fashion landscape during the 1990s and 2000s. It became problematic for Finland to be relatively isolated from the global industry, not only geographically but also in terms of business mindset and sensitivity to market trends. These conditions restricted the possibilities of Finland to become better recognized on the global fashion stage.

In relation to the progression of Finnish fashion, the influence of two relatively recent historic events was identified in the interview with Finnish design historian Pekka Korvenmaa. First, the development of new Finnish fashion accelerated after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (see also Van Eynde and Wiinamäki 2012). Despite being short, this history of new local fashion provided freedom to explore something innovative and unique. Before the collapse, Finland was an important supplier of various goods to the Soviet Union, especially textiles. After the collapse, the Finnish garment and textile producers lost their biggest and most stable client. Second, Finland's joining the European Union in 1995 challenged the local industry. Due to intensified competition from other European countries, Finnish business owners needed to revise their approach to face the drastic change.

Besides these two events, the competition between developed and developing countries in producing garments at a lower cost was an additional factor forcing Finnish fashion actors to rethink their future directions. As a result, the scale of domestic production of garments was decreased significantly, and small design-oriented firms with strengths in

craftsmanship began emerging in Finland around the 2000s (Korvenmaa 2010; Hohti 2011). During the interview, reflecting on her transition from pottery-making to dressmaking, prominent Finnish designer Vuokko Nurmesniemi noted that having a strong tradition in artistic approaches to design and material knowledge from workshop-based practice, Finland possesses a firm foundation for building a new wave of fashion as a distinctive national product on the global fashion market. Despite this promising potential, this stage of Finnish fashion only confirms an absent condition of relevant activities for place-making. These domestic and international-level disconnections restricted the local fashion industry to grow while also inviting a new initiative to emerge.

Origin of Pre-Helsinki: two solutions to reconnect

There was thereby an observable absence of diverse factors crucial to internationalizing Finnish fashion, including fashion-oriented business expertise in Finland, networking beyond the local community, and fashion-specific promotion efforts to reach broader markets. In an effort to overcome these disconnections, actors formed Pre-Helsinki as a collaborative platform to address two particular issues: increasing the international visibility of Finnish fashion and developing the business side of local fashion to be more fashion-friendly.

The initial idea of Pre-Helsinki emerged as a startup business by three master's level fashion design students from Aalto University⁹ (Satu Maaranen, Sofia Järnefelt, and Vilma Pellinen), who later became co-founders of the platform. In early 2012, they participated in the Fashion Business program organized by the Department of Design partnering with the Aalto Center for Entrepreneurship. In the interview with Finnish fashion educator Pirjo Hirvonen who was involved in the program, she explained that the program was a special competition to “spin out new, ambitious fashion-based startups” that would provide more visibility for Finnish fashion business and entrepreneurship (interview, November 13, 2016). During the program, the students received coaching sessions with local industry experts¹⁰ and identified gaps to be filled. Based on the interview with Maaranen, one of these three fashion students, apart from the fact that many fashion weeks are already established worldwide, they realized the small scale of Helsinki to hold such an event. They also recognized that in conventional fashion weeks, participants and visitors are involved in a hectic schedule running between events organized by numerous fashion houses. In contrast to this fast-paced schedule, the students intended to offer a different experience: more personal and relaxed. They aimed at creating an engaging fashion event where the visitors are “able to spend time to see the clothes, meet the designers, get to know them and learn about history and background of the design industry in Helsinki” (Maaranen, interview, February 5, 2016). To achieve this, they needed to collaborate with experts who understand the business of fashion.

While participating in this program, the three students met two marketing experts (Miia Koski and Martta Louekari) who worked for the Helsinki office of the World Design Capital (WDC).¹¹ In fact, the year 2012 was important for many local stakeholders beyond fashion as the city of Helsinki was selected as WDC. For this reason, the WDC Helsinki office organized a wide spectrum of events around design, some of which focused on fashion and aimed to introduce a fashionable side of the city to international visitors. These events included the Aalto University fashion show and Marimekko¹² public fashion show. From this experience, both the design and business sides recognized not only a strong need for collaboration but also an opportunity for developing an international platform that can promote Finnish fashion design globally.

As a result, in May 2013, three fashion designers who graduated from Aalto University and two marketing experts who worked for the WDC office joined forces to create something new for the city: the first Pre-Helsinki program. One of co-founders Koski explained the dual meaning of the name:

“Pre-” means something is coming. There was no expectation about Helsinki but suddenly it is becoming the fashion city. The other one is related to time. In the fashion calendar, the time [for Pre-Helsinki] is during the “pre-collection” season in April and May. (interview, March 30, 2016)

Through this new platform, both internationalization of Finnish fashion and establishment of local cooperation between fashion design and business were partially addressed. Accordingly, based on the interviewed experts (e.g., Mattila and Lindberg-Repo), soon after the launch, it was considered as the first internationally recognized fashion event from Finland, as it offered an opportunity for Finnish fashion designers to network beyond local media and actors. This early stage Pre-Helsinki demonstrates place-making at the domestic level as preparation for reaching the global.

As earlier studies presented (Rantisi 2011; Segre Reinach 2011; Skov 2011; McRobbie 2015), the symbolic and economic contributions in the development of a local fashion scene are key attributes in the place-making ability of fashion design. The origin story of the platform presents its primary contribution in the symbolic dimension through active promotion of Finnish fashion talents. Although the importance of the economic contribution was not emphasized, the cultivation of fashion-specific local business expertise is a noticeable factor. An issue relating to commercial implications will be introduced further in the following sections.

Activities: how it works

The two solutions to overcoming the challenge of connecting the local and the global were identified when viewing the ways in which Pre-Helsinki has operated. The main activities of the platform include a set

of events in which a number of Finnish fashion designers participate. The events differ in format from showcases of designers to design workshops and a pop-up store for the general public. Thus, Pre-Helsinki serves as a platform relying on the work of fashion designers and leveraging resources from different Finnish sectors to develop programs to increase the visibility of the Finnish fashion talents domestically and, more importantly, globally.

Two approaches were observed that linked the scale of place-making to the platform. For the annual program that invites influential international guests to Helsinki, other than being the capital of Finland, the city has been utilized to represent the Finnish fashion scene due to its clustering of most stakeholders and local resources. Thus, by organizing programs in the city, the platform has been able to increase the visibility of Helsinki and Finnish fashion to professionals in the global fashion business. Conversely, for the programs bringing designers to other foreign fashion events (e.g., Paris and Shanghai), it has acted as an active agent of promoting the city and the new identity of Finland as a fashion nation. This latter approach also functions to attract international visitors, especially journalists and buyers, to Helsinki.

Since the first program in 2013, the promotion of young Finnish fashion designers has been its main goal rather than direct sales of designers' products. While this absence of sales has allowed a local competitor to emerge recently, its focus on symbolic promotion of Finnish fashion through the global media has helped the platform to partially achieve its goal. To differentiate Pre-Helsinki from other fashion events in Finland and nearby countries, diverse events that can maximize the experiences of international visitors have been organized (c.f. Rantisi 2010; Skov 2011). The comment from branding expert Kirsti Lindberg-Repo supports this: "they created not just Pre-Helsinki to take place in Helsinki but also a new world around fashion Helsinki" (interview, June 9, 2016). This central idea remained the same despite certain changes to the annual program. Since its launch, the platform has created its own activities, including designers' presentations and a pop-up store. These activities have been designed by participating designers for the international guests, thus intending to demonstrate the unique approach of Finnish fashion (see Figure 1). To be able to invite highly influential guests, including editors from the international editions of *Vogue* and *Elle* ("Pre-Helsinki" 2016), the organizers have cooperated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These visits by foreign journalists and their articles in renowned global media have been considered as the measure of success for achieving its aim.

Alongside this hosting program in Helsinki, Pre-Helsinki has also offered their designers opportunities to reach out to other markets. Bringing their designers abroad is another way to increase visibility of Finnish fashion. For instance, group presentations during Paris Fashion Week and outreach programs to emerging markets, including Shanghai



Figure 1

Guests outside the presentation location of fashion designers during the Pre-Helsinki 2016 program. Copyright: Author.

and Hong Kong, have been organized annually since 2013. Visiting Paris is crucial for the platform to present its designers to influential journalists and buyers in the global fashion scene attending the event. Meanwhile, the outreach program has offered “matchmaking” services to individual designers of the platform. This program is usually organized based on the needs of their designers. From itineraries to meeting arrangements with potential clients, the platform has provided catered services to increase the potential of exporting and exposing Finnish fashion design globally.

Corresponding to the studies by McRobbie (2015) and Skov (2011), this case shows a possibility to utilize the place-making ability of fashion design in multiple scales from city to nation. Pre-Helsinki has contributed to the recognition of Finnish fashion at the local level by coordinating and developing various events aimed at attracting visitors under one roof. It has also contributed to the global recognition of Helsinki and Finland as places for artistic fashion through closely engaging with international visitors, including fashion journalists, recruiters, and buyers. This dual approach of Pre-Helsinki, embracing the city and the nation as well as the local and the global contexts, introduces a strategy for emerging places to maximize the opportunity that fashion design offers beyond dressing the public. By balancing between scales, Pre-Helsinki has demonstrated an alternative yet carefully curated approach for reimagining places via fashion design.

Main Actors: organizers, designers, and external partners

To internationalize Finnish fashion, Pre-Helsinki has built a strong relationship among organizers, designers, and partners. This section will further introduce these main actors and their involvement in the platform.

Including both the design and business sides of fashion has allowed the co-founders to construct Pre-Helsinki to be responsive to global fashion business. To develop and operate a series of programs, diverse tasks were required; thus, fully utilizing their expertise was vital. Through the interviews and the official website, the roles of the four organizers were identified, including the creative director, treasurer, PR (public relations)/marketing director, and production/branding director. The creative director is responsible for the design side of the platform. Therefore, understanding the ways in which fashion designers and the fashion industry work is the key consideration for this job. The PR/marketing director works to communicate externally, especially with international visitors while the production/branding director is usually involved in coordinating partners for its diverse programs. During the program in Helsinki, the production/branding director also takes responsibility to oversee activities that require constant coordination. Lastly, the treasurer manages the overall finances and administrative works for its activities. This internal organization of the platform shows the strong intention to support its designers, especially by emphasizing PR and marketing expertise. It also addresses the previously discussed issues of Finnish fashion, including the disconnections in the local and global context.

Second, the fashion designers are another important group of actors for Pre-Helsinki. Aiming at internationalizing Finnish fashion talents, the ways in which the platform selects participating designers have been a crucial issue. Maaranen emphasized that: “they are the center of everything that surrounds us, including the Pre-Helsinki organization, guests coming from abroad, and when we bring them to other cities like Paris. Everything starts from the designers” (interview, June 23, 2016). The key rule for a candidate is to have a connection to Finland and some international visibility with a relevant personal network to contribute to the platform. Through this selection, the platform both reinforces the reputation of Finnish fashion, which is often associated with artistic and textile-driven works, and introduces new breeds of designers continuously (Chun, Gurova, and Niinimäki 2017). On the one hand, selected designers present their works in multiple programs, including Sasu Kauppi, ensaemble and Lepokorpi (see Appendix 3 for the entire list). This helps both designers and the organization to show their development as well as continuity through consistency. On the other hand, partial changes of participating designers help the platform to avoid stagnation. Laitinen’s comment supports this: “The same press can't be flown here to see the same people for three years in a row. They need

to see these designers evolve into something else. [...] Its new breed keeps the interests of the press as well” (interview, March 15, 2016).

External partners have also been an important group of actors in supporting Pre-Helsinki. The platform gained an advantage by establishing an internal organization embracing both design and business sides of fashion, but in order to develop this cooperation further, broader external support was vital. For this study, partners from the 2016 program were mainly investigated to exemplify the case. According to the organizers and the official website, key partners were identified, including Aalto University, Marimekko, governmental and private agencies, and local companies. It was observed that each partner had a different relationship with the platform.

Aalto University has been the most important partner for Pre-Helsinki. Not only did the platform originate from the university, but also many participating designers graduated from it. Before its launch, the student fashion show of Aalto University (*Näytös* in Finnish, see Figure 2) had already attracted international guests due to both the recent success of its students in winning international competitions and Laitinen’s strong network. Since 2010, he has been at the university as a lecturer but his personal connections were built through previous experiences in London and Paris. Besides his current role at the university, he has also worked as fashion editor at *SSAW* magazine since its launch in 2012. For these reasons, including the Aalto University fashion show as one of the main activities has been natural for Pre-Helsinki.

Alongside this educational root, Marimekko has joined the Pre-Helsinki program annually. The brand has been considered as the representation of Finnish fashion since the 1950s (Ainamo 1996). More recently, its annual public fashion show has become a festive tradition for Helsinki to celebrate the beginning of the summer season since 1992. Due to the importance of the label within the Finnish fashion scene, the platform has been including this public fashion show in its annual program. Beyond its symbolic importance, Marimekko has provided opportunities for professional experience to young local designers. Including several designers from the platform, many young designers gain professional experiences through the brand.¹³

Other than these two symbolic partners of the platform, governmental and private agencies in Finland have provided practical support. With the goal of internationalizing Finnish fashion talents, Pre-Helsinki has been awarded grants from funding agencies, such as the Finnish Cultural Foundation, since its launch and receiving support from governmental organizations, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This result signifies that these actors began recognizing the effort of Pre-Helsinki and its potential as a vehicle for promoting the country and its culture through fashion. What is noticeable in this case is the limited governmental support for the platform compared to other cases, such as Danish fashion where the government developed a coherent supporting program for fashion (Riegels Melchior, Skov, and Csaba 2011).



Figure 2

The Aalto University student fashion show in 2016, which has grown in scale annually since its first presentation to international guests in 2012. Copyright: Author.

Additionally, numerous local partners have shown their support for the program. For instance, Artek, a Finnish furniture manufacturer of iconic products, offered its flagship store in Helsinki as a pop-up store to showcase products of Pre-Helsinki designers together with Artek items. The local branding agency Duotone was also involved in the program to produce high-quality multimedia footage, including video clips and photographs, to distribute to the international press.

These various support activities demonstrated the impact of the platform in initiating dynamic interaction at the local scale in order for the regional actors to realize Helsinki and Finland as places for fashion and collaborate while sharing its vision (Rantisi 2011; Riegels Melchior, Skov, and Csaba 2011). Figure 3 illustrates the dynamic relationship among the three groups. Through different forms of lines, it depicts how the relationship type differs between them.

As depicted above, this development of the local fashion ecosystem is a by-product of the platform. Previous studies on place-making emphasized the importance of cultivating active involvement of local actors (Rantisi 2011). It is clear that, from its launch to the current stage, Pre-

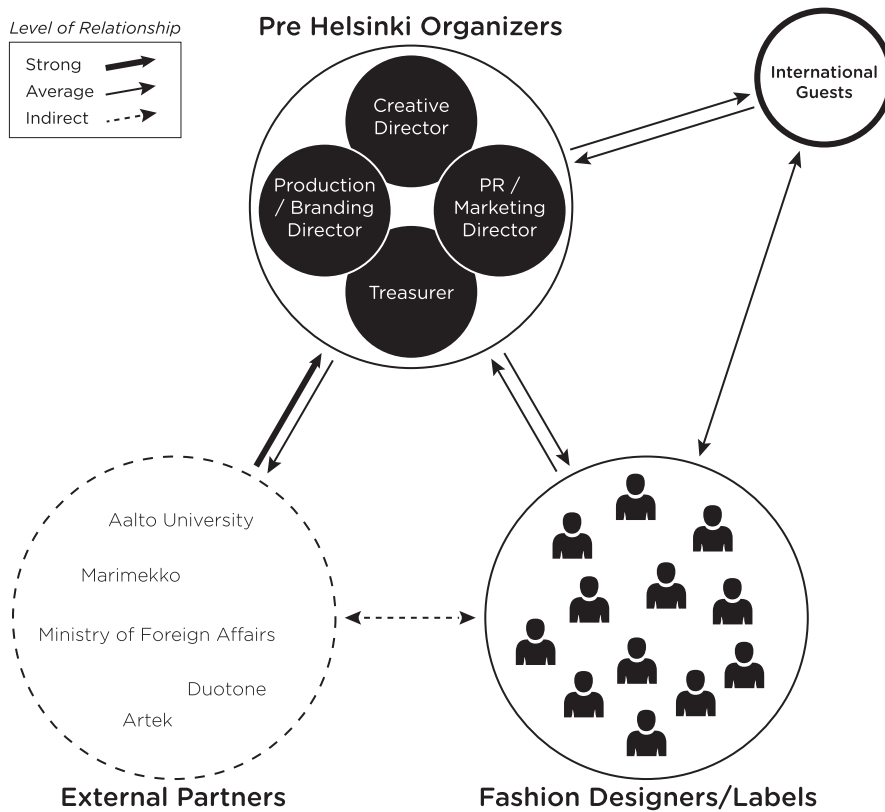


Figure 3

A visualization of main actors in Pre-Helsinki and their interrelationships. Copyright: Author.

Helsinki has mobilized local actors in different fields, including educational, governmental, and corporate organizations. Throughout its programs in and outside Finland, the platform has bridged not just actors striving to internationalize Finnish fashion talents but also existing capabilities in Finland.

Discussions on Challenges: the Business Side of Fashion

This section is devoted to the problems faced by Pre-Helsinki. As the platform has the status of not just a trailblazer but also a startup, it is natural to encounter diverse challenges. One of its initial goals, to increase international visibility of Finnish fashion, has been addressed through a joint effort of local stakeholders, which can be observed in the growing coverage of Finnish fashion in international media. Recently, major fashion magazines, including *Vogue Italia*, *W Magazine*, *i-D*, *Dazed*, and *Women's Wear Daily*, introduced young Finnish designers and Pre-Helsinki (Bottenghi 2016; Gush 2016; Stansfield 2016; Voight 2016; Wynne 2016). However, the economic growth of Finnish fashion has been restricted due to stagnated exports (Lille 2010; Van Eynde and Wünamäki 2012). These two contributing dimensions are equally relevant for turning Helsinki/Finland into places of fashion. Accordingly, internal and external tensions are noted from the business side.

The internal issue has occurred from the difficulty to self-sustain. As noted earlier, the lack of strong business orientation is a threat to Pre-Helsinki. The absence of direct sales and strong reliance on external funding urges the organization to evolve. In consequence, from the 2015 program, the platform experienced organizational changes as two founding members with marketing and PR backgrounds left their positions. With newly recruited organizers, strategic changes are expected in the following years.

During this internal change, a strong competitor emerged. Juni, a consulting company, was launched in 2015 to support the broader cultural industry in Finland, including fashion and design. The two members who left Pre-Helsinki founded the company; thus, certain similarities between the two organizations were observed, including activities and partners. However, it has a differing intention of providing financial success for their clients. Koski, co-founder of Juni, commented on the distinction: “We work with a much broader set of companies in order to have real business. [...] Our goal is to create this broader framework where different kinds of designers and companies all benefit. We want to help the Finnish fashion industry at large” (interview, March 30, 2016). To achieve this, Juni launched Helsinki New, a showcase for local fashion companies. It includes a broad range of companies apart from a selective group of artistic fashion designers/brands. While coordinating diverse events independently organized by participants, the Helsinki New showcase brought a larger number of international guests, especially from the Asian market.¹⁴ The showcase also organizes a series of events outside Finland for Finnish designers and brands to export their products in emerging markets, especially East Asia. With this competitor, the approaches developed by Pre-Helsinki have faced challenges.

These internal and external changes will surely influence programs of Pre-Helsinki to develop and improve its business agenda in the future. Based on Falay et al. (2007) who studied multiple cases of Finnish design-intensive firms, the partnership between design and business experts is crucial to sustaining their competitiveness while growing internationally. Such partnerships are especially important during not only the initial stage of establishment but also the growth stage. Similarly, the changes from the initial stage of Pre-Helsinki were a sign to prepare for the next stage to both sustain its current achievement and develop further. The reconstruction of the internal organization will initiate its new phase with stronger business implications while its foundational value, supporting the Finnish fashion talents, stays the same. The competition with Juni will encourage it to evolve to differentiate from the Helsinki New showcase or, instead, consolidate the efforts of the two platforms. Altogether these changes will cultivate a healthier fashion ecosystem in Finland.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to view how the concept of place-making works in the case of Pre-Helsinki. Based on identified three themes,

we considered place-making as an ability of fashion deriving from collaborative efforts of diverse actors aimed at pushing the fashion industry forward. In this case, such actors, including fashion designers, state officials, educators, and other professionals, were mobilized by the platform. This case was investigated in detail with particular attention to its background, origin, activities and main actors. It was demonstrated that the emergence of the platform was a response to global and domestic level disconnections from the peculiar Finnish fashion context. Pre-Helsinki addressed these disconnections by offering a set of activities aimed at promoting Finnish fashion internationally. It was noted that the disconnection between fashion design and business was addressed only to a limited extent, which allowed a competing platform, Helsinki New, to appear.

Alongside the organic development of Pre-Helsinki, the gradual internationalization of Finnish fashion has occurred. Finnish fashion designers have succeeded continuously in global competitions and some expansion of Finnish fashion brands, including R/H and Minna Parikka, in the international market has been observed. Furthermore, from the education side, Aalto University was marked highly on the global fashion school ranking of the *Business of Fashion* in 2016 and 2017. Altogether, these achievements have influenced governmental funding agencies, including Tekes (the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation), to support local fashion firms. Accordingly, this case study exemplifies that Pre-Helsinki has played a significant role as a grassroots initiative to contribute to both mobilizing local actors and building a meaning for Helsinki and Finland as places of fashion. Then, what path shall this platform follow?

According to the study by Riegels Melchior, Skov, and Csaba (2011) on the development of Danish fashion, four stages are identifiable. These stages include (1) problematization (adjustment to deindustrialization and the emergence of a designer fashion sector); (2) interessement (government's gradual reinterpretation of the cultural sector, especially fashion as an innovative industry worth of support); (3) enrollment (stabilization of networks and establishment of a leading institute); and (4) mobilization of allies (leading politicians' promotion of local fashion). Reflecting on these stages, we see the current transition of Finnish fashion is between the second and the third since the government has started recognizing the value of the Finnish fashion industry while local actors managed to mobilize and organize Pre-Helsinki. Compared to Denmark, Finland still lacks a leading institute unifying all local actors in order to further promote the Finnish fashion scene. However, Finnish fashion does not necessarily follow the same development trajectory as Denmark because the Finnish local ecology, including production facilities, domestic market size and educational emphasis, is distinct from the Danish context. Pre-Helsinki and its activities represent the unique path that Finland has constructed and recognize pluralistic scenarios for

increasing international recognition. Although the platform has faced challenges due to its changes, it can be argued that this unsettled and evolving status of the platform resembles the nature of fashion. Surfing on the ephemeral in fashion (Lipovetsky 1994), its process of making a place is still in progress. Whether Finland becomes the next fashion nation or not, the case of Pre-Helsinki has already contributed to global fashion by demonstrating an alternative possibility with its distinctive designers-first approach.

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Notes

1. See the official website of the Hyères Festival: <http://www.villanoailles-hyeres.com>.
2. See the official website of the LVMH Prize: <http://www.lvmhprize.com>.
3. The Antwerp Six refers to six Belgian designers, Walter Van Beirendonck, Ann Demeulemeester, Dries Van Noten, Dirk Van Saene, Dirk Bikkembergs, and Marina Yee. They graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts from Antwerp between 1980 and 1981.
4. See master's theses on the Finnish fashion industry (Salonoja 2013; Colliander 2015; Takkinen 2015) and a doctoral dissertation on Finnish fashion firm Marimekko (Ainamo 1996).
5. The official website of Pre Helsinki: <http://www.prehelsinki.fi>.
6. The official social media channels of Pre Helsinki: <https://www.facebook.com/PreHelsinki> and <http://instagram.com/prehelsinki>.
7. Gloria is the leading local fashion magazine in Finland. Official website: <http://www.gloria.fi>.
8. See the official website of Helsinki Design Week: <http://www.helsinkidesignweek.com>.
9. Aalto University was launched in 2010 through a merger of three independent universities in the Helsinki metropolitan area, the Helsinki University of Technology, Helsinki School of Economics and University of Art and Design Helsinki, with a strong emphasis on multidisciplinary education.

10. Many participants in this study were actually involved during this time of forming Pre-Helsinki as industry experts, including Pekka Mattila, Kirsti Lindberg-Repo and Vuokko Nurmesniemi.
11. World Design Capital is a biennial city-scale event organized by the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design to celebrate successful implementations of design in the selected city. See the official website <http://wdo.org>.
12. Marimekko is a Finnish fashion and textile company, which was launched in 1951.
13. In December 2017, Satu Maraanen was appointed by Marimekko as Head Designer of ready-to-wear, bags and accessories. Thus, a stronger relationship between Pre-Helsinki and the brand is expected. Previously, she had worked for the brand as a freelance designer for five years.
14. Martta Louekari, one of the co-founders of Juni, has a personal network in East Asia from her previous work experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Participants

Name	Role at Pre-Helsinki	Job	Note
Satu Maaranen	Creative Director, Co-Founder	Fashion designer at Marimekko	Head designer of ready-to-wear at Marimekko
Miia Koski	Project Manager and Producer, Co-Founder	Consultant at Juni	Co-Founder of Juni, a consulting firm
Martta Louekari	PR Director, Co-Founder	Consultant at Juni	Co-Founder of Juni, a consulting firm
Kirsti Lindberg-Repo	Expert	Professor at Aalto University in Branding	Teaching and consulting
Pekka Mattila	Expert	Professor at Aalto University in Business	Teaching and consulting
Tuomas Laitinen	Expert	Senior Lecturer at Aalto University, Fashion Editor of SSAW magazine	Teaching and consulting. Former designer at Laitinen
Vuokko Nurmesniemi	Expert	Designer / owner at Vuokko	Former designer at Marimekko
Laura Väinölä	Brand Director, Event Manager	Creative Director at Duotone	Newly joined for Pre-Helsinki 2016
Maija Juutilainen	PR and Marketing Director	PR Manager at Zalando	Newly joined for Pre-Helsinki 2016
Johanna Kotkajärvi	External Partner	Staff at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Director at the Department for Communications (Asia, Africa and the Americas)
Pirjo Hirvonen	Expert	Professor at Aalto University in Fashion Design	
Pekka Korvenmaa	Expert	Professor at Aalto University in Design and Culture	Finnish design historian

Appendix 2. Observed Activities of the Pre-Helsinki Program in 2016

No	Activity	Date	Organizer
1	Daniel Palillo “Mainly Portraits” Exhibition	May 20	Designmuseo (Design Museum)
2	Marimekko Public Fashion Show	May 20	Marimekko
3	Pre-Helsinki Pop-Up Store Opening Breakfast	May 23	Pre-Helsinki and Artek
4	Ville Varumo Exhibition “Playground” Open House	May 23	Ville Varumo (photographer)
5	Aalto ARTS Fashion Seminar	May 25	Aalto University
6	Tekstilli (Textile) 16 Exhibition Opening	May 25	Aalto University
7	Näytös 16 (Aalto University Fashion Show)	May 25	Aalto University
8	Pre-Helsinki House Presentation	May 26	Pre-Helsinki
9	Tekstilli 16 Exhibition Party	May 27	Aalto University
10	Pre-Helsinki “Working Shop”	May 28	Pre-Helsinki and Artek

Appendix 3. Participated Designers and Labels for Pre-Helsinki Programs

Type	Period	Location	Designers / Labels (Total Number)
Hosting	May 2013	Helsinki, Finland	ensaemble, Heikki Salonen, Laitinen, Marimekko, R/H, Lepokorpi, Sasu Kauppi and Siloa & Mook (8)
Outreach	September 2013	Paris, France	Sasu Kauppi, ensaemble, Siloa & Mook, Lepokorpi and Satu Maaranen (5)
Outreach	February 2014	Paris, France	Osma Harvilahti, Sasu Kauppi, ensaemble, Siloa & Mook and Lepokorpi (5)
Hosting	May 2014	Helsinki, Finland	ensaemble, Lepokorpi, Samuji, Satu Maaranen, Sasu Kauppi, Siloa & Mook, R/H and Marimekko (8)
Outreach	November 2014	Shanghai, China	ensaemble, Satu Maaranen and Siloa & Mook (3)
Hosting	May 2015	Helsinki, Finland	Lepokorpi, Sasu Kauppi, R/H, Samuji, ensaemble, Juslin Maunula, Satu Maaranen and Elina Määttänen (8)
Outreach	August 2015	Paris, France	Satu Maaranen, Juslin Maunula and Lepokorpi (3)
Outreach	November 2015	Shanghai and Hong Kong, China	ensaemble, Satu Maaranen, Juslin Maunula and R/H (4)
Hosting	May 2016	Helsinki, Finland	Hanne Jurmu & Anton Vartiainen, Satu Maaranen, Sophie Sälekari, Mannisto.co, Sofia Järnefelt, ensaemble, Lepokorpi, Sasu Kauppi, Siiri Raasakka, Achilles Ion Gabriel, Juslin Maunula and Tiia Sirén (12)
Outreach	September 2016	Paris, France	Aamu Salo, Hanne Jurmu, Juslin Maunula, Lepokorpi (4)
Hosting	May 2017	Helsinki, Finland	Aalto International, SSSU by Sasu Kauppi, Hanne Jurmu, Satu Maaranen, Aamu Salo, Ella Boucht, Lepokorpi, Achilles Ion Gabriel, Sophie Sälekari, Sofia Järnefelt, Siiri Raasakka, Self-Assembly, Juslin Maunula and Tiia Sirén (14)