



FUNDACIÓN
ENTRE SOLES Y LUNAS
patrimonio en movimiento

UNIVERSO MOLA

Recognizing fashion in Colombia:

Memories

MOLA FASHION TALKS

Colombia



Foreword

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Director of Universo MOLA

Colombia, a country that has stood out in Latin American history for its fashion and clothing industry, is it prepared to be a leader in sustainability? We ask ourselves, along with an interdisciplinary group of nationals and members of the sector, whether the nation is prepared in terms of public policies and communication practices for the current situation that pressures us towards a certain change in habits.

We listened to each other. We thought. We spoke from our own experiences as agents of change, designers, associations, communities, organizations and academics - everything we see today happening in Colombia, from our perspectives.

A space rich in co-creation, learning, and change management. We conclude that we are building a country. A group of women who want to see a more collaborative, more humane, and more united Colombia came to the conclusion that we still have work to do, but together we can push to make it happen.

The role of the state, the role of each industry actor, and the role of each Colombian citizen will be key and essential in order to protect what is ours, embrace our roots, and understand that this planet is borrowed.

Introduction	6	Problematics about Communication	20
Participants + grounding questions	7	Solutions for Communication	24
Problematics about the Public Policies	12	Conclusions	28
Solutions for Public Policies	16	Credits	32

Index

Introduction

In the continuous preparation for Universo MOLA Fashion Week 2024, after a day of training in MFD, Universo MOLA program of the Foundation Entre Soles y Lunas, MOLA Fashion Talks Colombia took place last Wednesday, August 16, 2023 in Bogotá.



The **Arturo Tejada Cano School** opened its doors to different actors in the textile industry to generate a day of workshops searching the exchange and discussion to recognize the problematic and possible solutions of the fashion industry and sustainability in Colombia.

The event agenda was divided into two parts. At the first instance, they carried out a workshop of co-creation together with Global Compact Colombia, where the different actors of Colombian fashion were divided into two groups to discuss two central themes: public policies and communication.



Participants + grounding questions



Public Policies

How advanced is the country in public policies for the fashion system?

In which areas of the fashion system are regulations lacking? Production? Design? Inclusion? Environment?

Is the fashion system being taken into account in Colombia?

Do we need people within the government to pay more attention to the fashion system in order to achieve real sustainability?

Should sustainability be more regulated? How? What is most important?

Can public policies support the local economy and sustainable fashion entrepreneurs?

Communication

What is fashion in Colombia communicating today?

How do we make fashion in Colombia more transparent in its communication?

What areas of communication should we consider to be more sustainable and transparent?

How can communication contribute to customer loyalty in Colombia?

Is the fashion system educated to communicate sustainability in Colombian fashion correctly?

Is communication connecting and educating consumers regarding the business sustainability of fashion?



Groups



1

Miriam Cardona - Pacto Global Colombia

Paula Delgadillo - Tu Ropero

Reguina Parra - Museo del Traje

Priscila Chuquizan - Tejedoras del Sol

Maria Clemencia Urazan



2

Doris Helena Rojas - Fundación Entre Soles y Lunas

Ledys Maestre - Lady's Confecciones

Andrea Saieh - Andrea Saieh

Leslie Valoyes - Asociación Arte y Joyas

Laura Añez - Laura Añez Textiles



Problematics about the Public Policies

As a result, the following problems were observed according to economic, environmental and social aspects, with respect to public policies.

Economic

- The consumption of textiles from China and other countries due to their lower cost results in a decrease in the exports and imports of national garments in Colombia, due to the lack of added value.
- Governmental entities allocate the funds intended for business support to consultants and advisors, which leaves the companies themselves with insufficient support.
- There is a lack of support for microenterprises in their efforts to export their products.

Environ- mental

- A critical issue in the textile manufacturing and clothing processes is water usage, given its extensive consumption. While taxes are imposed based on production, water consumption does not receive the same level of consideration.
- Although there is a general awareness about waste separation and recycling, the reuse and recycling of textiles still lacks sufficient awareness. While many people might be conscious of this, the absence of a proper system can be an obstacle. A system is needed to ensure the donation, reuse, and other sustainable disposal methods for discarded textiles both from individuals and from factories and suppliers.

Social

- The connection between fashion and public policies is established primarily through cultural and heritage aspects, rather than directly addressing the fashion industry itself. For instance, when creating garments that combine contemporary and traditional elements, it is necessary to manage such projects within the cultural sector.
- The handicrafts process in Colombia often appears stagnant, limiting opportunities for small businesses and companies in comparison to other fields. Registration and classification requirements exclude many artisans from participating in festivals and other events, resulting in more limits than support.
- The lack of support for national ideas and the essence of Colombian identity is being questioned. Where is the protection of what is inherently ours?
- Regarding tangible heritage, the system in Colombia does not function effectively. There is a lack of knowledge on how to recognize and preserve heritage, which necessitates a fight to achieve desired outcomes.





Solutions for Public Policies

In order to solve these issues, several options were discussed in different areas.

Economic

- It is proposed to apply tariffs or taxes to imported fabrics, thus incentivizing the use of domestically-produced textiles and promoting their consumption.
- Regulation of imports and the textile industry. Value added throughout the entire supply chain, beyond importation. Ensuring all links in the production chain.
- Implementation of a context that promotes the growth of entrepreneurship. For example, economic investment by banks for creation and learning. Investing in something that is potentially profitable and capitalizable.
- Establishing fair trade for producers, exempting taxes for natural fibers and those that are not harmful to the environment. Defining a fair value throughout the chain and ensuring this process through projects in collaboration with entrepreneurs, assisting, for example, entrepreneurs in export processes, demonstrating support for microenterprises.



Environmental

- Create regulations that require traceability for each garment, implementing sustainable labels endorsed and certified by the Ministry of the Environment.
- Establish cooperatives and strategic alliances with the aim of jointly promoting legislative initiatives. Associate within a solid legal framework.
- Ensure the use of the territory. Despite possible innovations and modernizations, ancestral practices persist, generating natural fibers in the territories. This approach allows for the preservation of their sustainable use.
- Establish a system that guarantees that your textile will be donated, recycled, or reused through a different collection process. For example, discarded textile from factories, sewing houses, or even citizens will be collected in bags or different colors for textiles, distinguishing them from common waste, especially in areas with a large amount of discarded textiles. It is essential to bring the textile industry's interest to the attention of the government, as clothing is something we all use 24/7.



Social

- To develop plans through government institutions related to fashion.
- Align government systems at all levels to ensure sustainability in various fashion systems, encompassing not only the local level but also the departmental, municipal, national, and international levels.
- Integrate different ministries such as Industry and Commerce, Tourism, Education, and Environment. Once this union is established, the aim is to formulate specific policies that preserve the practices, techniques, and knowledge of Colombian identity.



Problematics about Communication

As a result of the debate on communication in Colombia, the following issues were observed.



Fantasy Aesthetic

Based on Colombiamoda sales data, it was found that "button lifter" denim had the highest demand in countries like Peru and Ecuador.

International Fast Fashion

The rise of fast fashion and the influence of foreign style have resulted in the adoption of non-local fashion trends. There is a significant consumption of international fashion in these regions.

Scantly Clad Trends

Currently, the most impactful fashion trends are those that embrace a more revealing aesthetic. On social media, it is common to see influencers promoting clothing that leaves little to the imagination, as it tends to attract the most attention. This trend also correlates with higher sales.

Unconscious consumption

Impulsive buying behavior is prevalent, with people making purchases based on brand recognition or the fact that others have used the product. Unfortunately, only a small number of consumers are aware of the traceability of the products they consume.

Lack of knowledge

Companies and brands that promote sustainability often provide inadequate descriptions of their product compositions when communicating about their products. These descriptions lack specificity and demonstrate a lack of knowledge about the information they are attempting to convey.

Cultural Appropriation

When attempting to sell a product, numerous brands and businesses engage in inappropriate cultural appropriation, resulting in the distortion of cultural concepts.

Language

Several companies use English labels for domestic products. A fact that lacks coherence if we are talking about a national product.





Solutions for Communication

To improve these themes, possible solutions for customer loyalty were evaluated.



Accessibility in consumer PQR terms

In many cases, small businesses do not have an established complaints or claims system. Therefore, attention should be focused not only on the sales process but also on the post-sale experience.



Traceability laws

Similar to how food products carry labels certified by the Ministry of Health, it is important to establish seals on textiles certifying their composition, origin, contamination levels, etc.



Personify companies and ventures

It is crucial to demonstrate that there are one or more people behind a project. Putting a face to the brand generates a sense of belonging and transparency. Communication should evoke emotions, enabling consumers to feel empathy and speak positively about the brand.



Exploit the Universo Mola Hub

Give more visibility to the projects within this network. Conduct interviews that showcase the processes and history of these brands. This approach aims to humanize enterprises and create a stronger connection with consumers.



Improve education

Emphasize the importance of sustainability, values and practices in school education. It is important to teach children about their responsibility towards the environment from an early age.

In the second instance, a designer panel was held where guests exchanged opinions about the various issues discussed and identified possible solutions. The speakers for this event were: Lina Bermeo, TARPUI designer and chair of sustainable fashion at Escuela Aturo Tejada. Laura Añez, textiles, Director, designer and artisan of Laura Añez Textiles. Paula Forero, Director at Velasco de Gayo and Ricardo Castro, designer and creative director at Ricardo Castro.



Conclusions



In conclusion, the challenges related to public policies and communication in the Colombia fashion industry are recognized as significant in economic, environmental and social aspects.



Regarding the economy, the negative influence of low-cost textile imports is causing a decline in the exports of the national industry, highlighting the lack of value added for Colombia. Additionally, the allocation of government funding to support small businesses is not proving to be effective.

From an environmental perspective, the excessive water consumption in the textile industry is a critical issue that needs attention. The lack of regulation regarding its usage contrasts with taxes based on production. Furthermore, there is limited awareness and practice of reusing and recycling garments. An urgent need exists

for a system that ensures the sustainable disposal of discarded textiles.

In the social aspect, the insufficient support for cultural identity and barriers to entrepreneurship emphasize the need for more inclusive and coherent policies in the industry.

To address these issues, various solutions have been proposed, including implementing tariffs on imports, improving education and investment in business, implementing traceability regulations in the textile industry, and enhancing cooperation between government ministries.



In the realm of communication, several challenges exist, such as the prevalence of fantastical aesthetics, the widespread adoption of Fast Fashion, the tendency to showcase revealing clothing on social media, and unconscious consumption. Additionally, cultural misappropriation, lack of product knowledge, and the use of inappropriate labels are prevalent issues.

The solutions for these issues include enhancing the accessibility of consumer complaints and claims, implementing traceability laws in the textile industry, encouraging companies and small businesses to personify their brands to foster empathy and sensitivity among consumers. Utilizing platforms like the Mola Hub network to share stories and processes of brands to create a sense of belonging, and improving school education by emphasizing sustainability across all areas.

"It was a space where we shared stories from different individuals, each with their unique vision of sustainable fashion. It was incredibly enriching to listen to diverse points of view and bring them together to discuss what we do, fueling the purpose behind the issue. Instances like this truly inspire us to keep creating and promoting these gatherings, allowing the communication and message of sustainable fashion to reach a wider audience" says Laura Añez, designer at Laura Añez Textiles.



Credits

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Pacto Global Colombia**

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