

“Fashioning Interwar Berlin: Exploring Fashion and Clothing in the German Capital”

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When early 20th century Berlin is discussed, conversation typically turns to industrial advancements in the fields of electricity and manufacturing and the city’s arts scene. Little focus is given to other industries, specifically that of fashion. At the beginning of the 20th century however, Germany’s clothing industry, which was predominantly located in Berlin, was the second biggest employer and reached significant profits in the export market (Guenther, 2017). Research into industry lead firms, the role of the Jewish community within the sector, and its Aryanisation has been completed (Guenther, 2004; Kessemeier, 2016; Kreutzmüller, 2017; Westphal, 1992). Yet, a view into the sector’s structure and evolution is lacking, specifically for the Interwar years. This paper aims to present an initial view into the sector, employing primary and secondary research to conceptualise the internal structure of the industry during the 1920s and 1930s.

Considering the structure of the industry and that of other fashion locations such as Paris, New York, Milan, Tokyo and London, the study will assess the way that the Berlin fashion sector developed during the early 20th century. Such analysis, will add to and deepen current knowledge of the city during a period of significant financial fluctuations and political upheaval. Furthermore, it will contribute to a greater understanding of the nature of fashion locations, fashion and politics, urban geographies and economics while providing a context for the consideration of Berliner fashion in the later 20th and early 21st century.