

## Innovative approach to design of corporate clothing for the staff of SPIRIT Slovenia

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*The main aim of this article is to present the complex challenges of design and development of the corporate clothing which represented the image of Slovenia at the international trade fair Expo Milano 2015. Details of uniforms are defined in various aspects: superior protection of the body, functionality, design, aesthetics, quality, communications power, cost and other areas. To achieve those aspects we needed to use different methods for making the concept first, then getting from concept to design and later on to the production of corporate clothing outfit. Designing corporate clothing is a challenge from many points of view, thus innovative approaches are always needed. In the example given here we needed to design a clothing image that corresponds to all requirements and needs of the subscriber and prepare a convincing and unique concept. In the first phase we needed to observe the situation to gain an understanding of what the subscriber needed, research the possibilities of implementation of design, and experiment with different materials. It was a challenge to manage the collaboration between subscriber, designer, suggested manufacturer and faculty. As a result, we developed and made corporate clothing in the company Moda Mi&Lan d.o.o., which is equipped with the necessary accessories for the technique of air lace in the shape of Slovenia, made by students. This project shows a good example of story and products, created by successful collaboration of experts in different areas of working. Comfortable corporate clothing satisfied the end user for different weather conditions, dependent on place and time, whilst reflecting many stories about Slovenia.*

**Key words:** *innovative corporate clothing, EXPO 2015, air lace, storytelling*

### 1. Introduction

International fair EXPO is organised every five years and is the largest commercial promotional opportunity for every country focusing on tourism, culture and infrastructure [1]. In the 2015 the fair was held in Milano, Italy. Slovenia was one of 144 countries represented. For the representa-

tion of Slovenia at Expo Milano 2015. the public agency SPIRIT Slovenia was chosen. SPIRIT Slovenia placed emphasis on strengthening the visibility and reputation of the country, through the theme of »I Feel Slovenia, Green. Active. Healthy«. Slovenia was represented by its own pavilion, where the image created by

the staff's corporate clothing was very important.

Spirit Slovenia published the tender for design and production of corporate clothing for staff for Spirit Slovenia for Expo Milano 2015. Their own requirements were defined in the tender documentation [2]. Importance was placed on the definition of

details about provider, design and fabrics. In our case, the provider was high-end textiles Producer Company Moda Mi&Lan d. o. o., which was able to meet the high quality requirements and develop very demanding clothing. They connected in the starting point with Studio Design, where many different corporate clothing images in Slovenia had been designed previously. The design challenge was to promote Slovenia at the worldwide level through corporate clothing design, with the aim to be innovative, to represent stories about Slovenia, to be elegant, dynamic and comfortable at the same time.

This example of design shows how key information can be reflected in corporate clothing design. Clothing can use emotion and visual cues to tell an understandable story. In tourism, the story told by clothing can be as important a part of presenting of a country as other aspects of representation.

## 2. Methods

Designing corporate clothing is a complex task. It includes methods of gathering and analysing information. The process of research results in an appropriate background of words and emotions to create an artistic basis. Research presents the key framework to create the concept and design of corporate clothing. Technical aspects of planning, and development of a prototype, its realisation, corrections and evaluation are the key phases before final production begins. Regarding different approaches and stages of work, there are individual and team projects, as well collaboration of many different associations that produce the end result.

## 3. Research

### 3.1. Requirements as the starting point of thinking process

The starting point of the thinking process was to research both themes of the fair and of the Slovenian pavilion. It was important to represent the

Slovenian theme at EXPO Milano: »I Feel Slovenia, Green. Active. Healthy« Also important for the process was to discover the main Expo Milano theme: "Feeding the planet. Energy for life." Together, these were the inspiration for the development of the designs.

In the tender, the subscriber defined which clothing and colours they need for the Milan EXPO 2015. Women and men's outfits were required to reflect freshness and youth, and also had to provide free moving, durable clothing with the possibility of home washing. Both women and men's outfits should be colour-coordinated. The style of both should be universal; to cover business, evening and sociable purposes [2].

For women their wishes were to design a short dress, with or without sleeves, in grey, with green details. The green colour should be the same as in the logo of the brand. [2].

Their wish was also to find an innovative way to place logo of the brand [3]. To make the combination with the dress they specified that a green or grey t-shirt could be worn underneath. They also specified shoes should not have high heels.

The men's outfit should have grey trousers without an ironed seam in the middle, grey shirt with short sleeves and green details and the same requirements regarding logos and symbolic value as the women's clothing. They also would like to have an appropriate jacket to complete the outfit.

Their wish was also to include grey colours that could be worn during the warmer part of the year, when the fair is held. The grey colour is neutral and often used in official and business clothing.

### 3.2. Logo variations as basis for colour palette and its use in design

The meaning of colour plays important role in the fashion industry. Colour theory is a combination of many different areas and brings together physics, art and psychology [4]. Scully & Johnson – Cobb (2012) wrote: "Colour is a shortcut than conveys a message quickly and directly without the time-consuming use of words or complex images". Corporate clothing should be consistent with its meaning in colours, shapes, cultural areas.

The first step in the research was defining of colours. As our source we took logos of the brand *I feel Slovenia* [3], which was the starting point of the colour research. There are four logo variations: two in black-white and white-black basic (Fig.1) and two in green-white and white-green colour combinations. The logo has written "I FEEL SLOVENIA", using a combination of bold and normal stressed letters, with colours of letters playing the main role of exposing the visual and meaning play of the logo. Analysis of the logo provides the first information for further research in corporate clothing design. The middle grey letters (S, N, I, A) of the black-white logo variation (Fig.1) could be used for basic clothing. In the corporate clothing we utilised three grey colours: darker for the suit and dresses of the main part of the team, middle grey clothing for other staff, and light grey for men's shirts. The green colour from the logo in green-white and white-green colour combinations is used as a colour accent. Green colour was used as over-stitching the seams, which are important part of design. The size variation



Fig.1 Logo of the brand "I feel Slovenia" in black-white and white-black colour combinations.

of the logo in green-white was used for embroidery of "I feel Slovenia".

### 3.3. Corporate clothing design and its power of communication in society

Dressing in a deeper sense reflects the sociological, psychological and social aspects [5], which are manifested in the form of responses of people in society, as well as being a link between art and clothing, combining the spiritual and social nature of human behaviour [6].

Uniform or corporate clothing is worn by different workers and groups of people who represent membership of a group in a social environment. On an international level, staff that represent a country by displaying corporate clothing for a certain time demonstrate an aspect of a strong corporate identity which helps to build strong symbolic communication about the country and, at the same time, build a new connection with visitors.

We can talk about developing of uniforms using multi-criteria decision making, where we consider protection of the body, functionality, design, aesthetics, quality, communications power, cost and some other factors. Optimal design in the aesthetic context is a relative concept, because we have different criteria for assessing what is good and consistent and what is not. We can agree with the statement [7], that the end product should be aesthetically acceptable and useful at the same time. The functionality of corporate clothing is very important. People have to wear it in very different conditions and user acceptance and feedback is the key in deciding between different ways of design [8].

There are a lot of researchers who write that clothing has the power of symbolic communication [9]. Many studies prove that uniforms have a strong impact on society, they have powerful meanings and are a communication link with society. Results of research [10] show that clothing is a

powerful communication tool. We can say, clothing is a communication connection with society that shows a person's role, status, affiliation to a group and the position of a person in a group [9].

Colours and patterns of clothing can define the level of openness or authority of the clothing's image [11]. An incorrect style of clothes can have bad consequences, such as the loss of authority, if clothing is not elegant or formal enough when this is expected [12].

The psychological aspect of the perception of colours and their effect on our behavior manifests itself in different emotional reactions to the individual colours. The colour of clothes (and uniforms) also affects our perception of others. Also, the colour of the uniform influences the reaction of the environment in contact with the uniformed person [13]. At the sight of the uniform or the person who wears it, we perceive different sensations.

We can conclude, the designer of corporate clothing is in a position to presuppose how elements of design will influence non-verbal communication and the desired feeling in those who encounter a person in uniform.

We can discuss as well, the need for uniqueness in the tourism context [14]. Regarding the corporate clothing design, the need for uniqueness is present as well. We can say design became a part of the storytelling in tourism context.

### 3.4. Storytelling in corporate clothing design

Storytelling is becoming popular in different areas of work. It is included in tourism in four different fields: marketing, product development, interpretation and tourist's recounting of their experience [15]. As a part of product development, storytelling is one of many principles of design. It is "a method of creating imagery, emotions, and understanding of events through an interaction between a storyteller and audience"

[16]. In the book *Storytelling* [17] (Fog et al., 2010) it is written "When you tell a story, on the other hand, those terms come to life through powerful images and place your values in a more dynamic context."

Relationships between storytelling and brands, where fashion brands take part are discussed in [18] with reference to psychology where consciousness and unconsciousness are influenced by stories. During the time myths, that are important part of stories, build archetypes. They analyse the context of stories and discuss the causes of understanding their effect on consumers.

Storytelling is also an effective device for Fashion design. Authors [19] find out, "that story used interactively is a powerful tool for attention, understanding and change in both individuals and communities." After theory research, they proposed text-, visual-, audio- and virtual-factors of the fashion design research process. They suggest four steps from research to design: "exploring stories, planning a story, building the story, and storytelling". For storytelling analysis, they suggest four steps: "gathering and analysing information, building a concept, planning and developing a design, evaluation and making the decision on fashion design process." They made comparative analyses and discuss the closeness between structures in each stage. Johansson [20] discusses, that "Storytelling is categorized in two ways from the designer's perspective: as input and output. As input, storytelling is a supporting tool collecting insight on user experience. As output, a story could be communicated through telling, writing or visualization."

The aspect of textile and fashion design that includes local motifs is a very important part of tourism. On one side, we have corporate clothing that includes motifs, colours or design, recognisable for one area or country. On another side, as souvenirs, we can find printed motifs ev-

erywhere, mostly on t-shirts, hats or some other models or accessories from textiles. In many cases, both of them tell stories about visited places. One of examples that prove the importance of local motifs is research that explores “the communication of Australasian cultural motifs to overseas tourists through the production and sale of designer apparel” [21]. They discovered that 56 percent of tourists had bought New Zealand produced clothing and, of these, 68 percent said it was important to choose New Zealand design. The example shows the importance of authenticity that derives from cultural heritage as well the importance of local made textile articles.

There are lot of designers who use storytelling as the basis to making textile patterns. Everyday situations visually transfer in pattern, which is repeated many times and can relax or inspire us [22]. Actually, any pieces of daily life can become a pattern. Viewers can have also personal memories in response seeing a design and react to the story in a personal way [23, 24].

Corporate design clothing is a media where there is visible interaction between staff, who communicate through clothing, with visitors and passengers, who understand the visible language of corporate clothing. It communicates through the shapes, lines, patterns and colours.

### **3.5. Fashion design, functional design and eco-fashion**

Fashion design follows the fashion system with fashion fairs, development of models, their evaluation and production, deliveries and catalogues, fashion shows. Groups of expected customers for each sale are defined, but each customer with his requirements is still not known.

The process of designing functional design is connected to the end user and his specific requirements [25]. We can define, that corporate clothing is a group of functional clothing, where the end user and his require-

ments are most important, so the model must be usable first and foremost. Gupta wrote, “these requirements, whether for performance or for comfort, are determined by the environment in which for the user operates, and the activities that he or she performs”. He subdivided requirements into four groups: physiological, biomechanical, ergonomic and psychological considerations and, all together, gives information about future models and requirements that must be considered in the process of design.

Trends are important for whole fashion industry. Extremes are present as fads, but with functional design, function is most important. Trends and necessities in fashion are focused toward sustainable production, sometimes so cold green or eco-fashion that corresponds as well with principles of slow fashion [26]. On one side the customer became part of the design process [27] (Peršuh, 2014), so the creator of the model is more influenced by the relationship between the customer, fashion and the final product. This relationship becomes long-term [28], also including the repair and redesigning of the model. As a result; the product has longer life than the model without cooperation in the phase of making or emphatic design approach. With that kind of cooperation in design, we can talk about empowered design. Authors [28] discuss this relationship, where the “empathic approach can be of primary importance in promoting sustainable product relationships by deepening current methods of understanding consumers’ needs, values and emotions.” In the Niinimäki’s research [26] “94.6% of respondents were ready to buy better quality, durable, repairable, more expensive clothes in the future and use them for longer to decrease their own environmental impact«. There are still a lot of open questions about eco-fashion in the whole chain from idea to customer. Results of research shows [26], that there are less than 10 percent of peo-

ple (so cold “ethical hardliner”) that live their lifestyle in accordance with eco-fashion. Future values in fashion industry are next to consider and emotional value, considered toward environmental value [26].

If we are focused on creativity in fashion collections, functionality in functional and corporate clothing and eco-fashion trends, we can get a clothing image that corresponds to end user requirements, in better quality, durable, repairable clothing, at the and in the same time with better environmental impact.

## **4. Analysis and Design**

### **4.1. Exploring stories of promotional titles as basis for corporate clothing design**

Storytelling in the corporate clothing for the staff of Slovenia at the EXPO Milano fair was inspired by all received information and further research of the meaning and personal feelings gained from exploring promotional titles of the EXPO Milano trade fair and Slovenian pavilion, as well the logo “I feel Slovenia”.

The EXPO Milano promotion title “Feeding the planet, energy for life” was one part of inspiration in the thinking process for the corporate clothing design. The flow of thinking results in some words, which produced the main idea of the design through the next thinking process: FOOD is connected to BODY and LIFE. There is no life without food. Slovenia has very good local food, which gives great ENERGY for life. We need energy, to live, to be creative, to leave trace of being. Energy is needed for MOTION and EMOTION and initiates PERSONALISATION and with it also personal stories). We get FOOD from FIELDS. They are divided with different plants, which gave us DIVERSITY of STRUCTURES. We can understand fields as well as SHAPES and LINES or CUTS on clothing.

The context and the theme, that represents brand and its presentation in



the Slovenian pavilion is full of values, applied in daily life, that can provoke feelings for everyone. The Slovenian promotion title »I feel Slovenia. Green. Active. Healthy!« inspired me in the following way: GREEN - Slovenian nature is full of green VEGETATION, which is rich with different STRUCTURES. In an artistic way it reminds of the GREEN LACE. To be ACTIVE in the visual language is ASYMMETRICAL, INNOVATIVE it make CONTRASTS and gives DIVERSITY in lines. Active LINES remind again on asymmetrical CUTS. HEALTHY is connected with MOVING and FOOD. It is UNIQUE and PERSONALISED by each person.

As research we also took the logo "I feel Slovenia", which has clear story in its lines, colours and text.



Fig.2 Logo of the brand "I feel Slovenia" as inspiration for dynamic lines of design

Results of analysis are intertwined and highlighted with personal interpretation of Slovenian cultural and natural heritage.

#### 4.2. Building a concept of corporate clothing

The main idea for a design solution developed in two separate phases. Both the technical part and the part where "emotions meet aesthetics" gave produced the final result.

Firstly, the technical part was based on received requirements for technical details: colour definition, kind of models, working place and conditions, wishes about care of models, gender of staff and their sizes. With finding appropriate suppliers, their fabrics and colours, that corresponded visually and technically, to received wishes and requirements in

tender, the technical part of the concept was prepared to next level of the concept and design.

Another part of developing the idea was "emotional research". It was based on the titles of the trade fair, Slovenian pavilion and logo, described in the point 4.1. Results of analysis led to a rethink and redesign in the context of stories, that are told on clothing. They materialised in fabrics, cuts, details, all in accordance with aesthetical laws of proportions. Information gathered and analysed was the background of building a concept of corporate clothing where both technically appropriate and innovative design results into a storytelling design [23,24]. The focus of research is an innovative design approach that combines input information and converts them into visual language. Functional design is also related to the inclusion of lace-making techniques in a way that has not yet been used - in the sense of fashion accessories with the story.

#### 4.3. Developing design of corporate clothing

Design followed initial research. Explanation of one group of words causes the aesthetics of design that lead to the next group of words:

- ACTIVE, MOVING, MOTION, ENERGY, CONTRASTS, LIFE and FIELDS - in design follow toward ASYMMETRICAL MODELS.
- ACTIVE, INNOVATIVE, PERSONALISATION and EMOTION in design follow toward DIVERSITY.
- FIELDS, SHAPES, LINES and CUTS in design follow toward CUTS and CROSS-SECTIONS IN DESIGN.
- GREEN, VEGETATION, FIELDS, FOOD, DIVERSITY in design follow toward COLOUR ACCENT LINES AND ACCESSORIES.
- HEALTHY, LIFE, BODY, FEELINGS and VALUE in design follow toward PERSONALISED DESIGN.

- VEGETATION, STRUCTURES, CONTRASTS, INNOVATIVE, UNIQUENESS and in design follow toward PERSONALISED GREEN LACE.

All words are recognisable in design, shown on Fig.3, 4 and 5. You can recognise asymmetrical models, cross-sections with focus on green lines and personalised air lace accessories. Models are, at the same time in accordance with business requirements (colours, lengths, quality making).

If going through exposed words, we can have a few short stops. With lines, for example: we have one kind of transfer of the logo to the clothing, made by use of lines inspired by the shape of the logo "I feel Slovenia". It represents the starting point in the lines of the clothing. In the Figure (Figure 2) it is clearly seen, how some of outline borders of the logo are extended and so we get parts of sections of clothing, finally we can say, this lines are the defining patterns of all clothing. At the same time, sections of the divided parts symbolically represent fields that are thematically tied to the source of nutrition as part of the main theme of the fair Expo Milano 2015 (feeding the planet). Green sewn lines create contrasting dynamic surfaces of different parts; all lines depend on the logo "I feel Slovenia". Consequently, we get asymmetrical lines, which represents activity, and this is the way the design corresponded to the exposed theme (Active).

Regarding the design of the uniform, we can see many straight lines of different inclination (Figure 3,4), that give asymmetry and dynamics to the design. Some of the lines were later adapted during production for easier manufacture. The sketches for women's clothing are presented separately as basic models (Figure 3) and separate accessories (Figure 5), while the sketches for men (Figure 4) included the accessory, that replaced the tie.

Embroidery of "I feel Slovenia" is positioned at the top of jackets, on the chest of the shirt, under the collar of



Fig.3 Design of basic pieces of corporate clothing for women, front of models on left side, back on the right side



Fig.4 Design of corporate clothing for men

the men's jacket and is always surrounded with two or more lines, taken out of the logo (Figure 1). Positions of the embroidery empowered energy from the heart to the highest part of models; which is the most exposed part of the clothing. These positions are also the most exposed parts of clothing and could be clearly seen in communication with other people.

#### 4.4. Research, design and making of air lace accessories

With soft shaped accessories around the neckline, we can make the clothing's image softer. We decided to make an accessory using the technique of air lace in the shape of Slo-

venia for women (Fig.5), which could be worn in many different ways. This accessory has many symbolic meanings. Firstly, many threads represent connections between people, living in Slovenia. As well, the quilted surface density represents the sprouting plants from which can be produced food. It represents a new beginning, a new life, the liveliness of interlacing. Plants are very important for the food chain and for the healthy life.

The accessory for men is simple, effective and innovative. Many times men don't want to wear the tie for two reasons: the weather is too hot and they don't feel comfortable (in Milano the temperature can reach 35 or more in summertime) and also,

when serving food, the tie can be sometimes disruptive. So innovation in this way was needed. We developed a variant of the tie that on the bottom could be fixed on the shirt with buttons and on the front part it was made as air lace. This was the band that could replace tie for men. We solve both problems: the "tie" is fixed and could not disrupt serving food and, if the weather is too hot, the person is able to open the shirt and the "tie" was still looking professional and special. It is a good idea to solve similar problems of wearing ties in the tourism sector.

The idea of air lace accessories includes personalisation, uniqueness and different stories about Slovenia. Students and employees of Cathedra for textile materials and design, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, University of Maribor, made accessories that represent their personal view about Slovenia.

Fashion accessories in the form of laces are green in colour which is consistent with the comprehensive graphic image of the brand »I feel SLOVENIA«. It is lace, produced on the basis of sewing the water-soluble embroidery base with thread (Fig.6). The process of making this type of lace is creative; a lot of effort, know-how, precision and patience have been invested in these unique products. When using a sewing machine, the embroidery basis has only the function of temporary device which is later removed. Thus a minimalist record is created which illustrates diverse impressions of students' views of Slovenia. Structures emerging from thread surfaces enable a 3D rep-

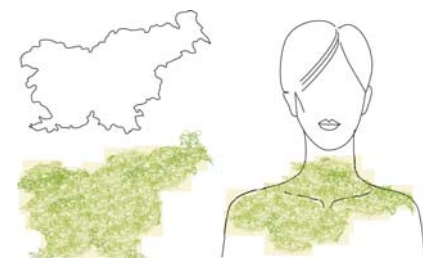


Fig.5 Accessory in the shape of Slovenia, and its use





Fig.6 Making air lace



Fig.7 Detail designed air lace



Fig.8 Melting of water-soluble material

resentation of the landscape and its characteristics in the area.

In accordance with the motto of the fair and Slovenian pavilion the paraphrasing of structural and textural characteristics of the form of Slovenia and Slovenian regions, individual features are exposed, both in terms of terrain morphology, biotopic diversity with forest, rural and urban areas logistically connected by highway and railway network as well as river basin, on national as well as state symbolism. This led to the creation of work pieces that complete stories on the topic of Slovenia and express Slovenian identity; at the same time they spread ethnographic heritage up to the realm of modern interpretations and applications which is an extre-



Fig.9 The uniform in use, Photo: <https://www.facebook.com/SloveniaExpoMilano2015/>

mely important contribution to the mosaic of Slovenian culture and its image.

Steps of making air lace begins with the map of Slovenia. In our case we show the map of population density in regions as step one, next step is sawing on water-soluble material (Fig.6 and 7) and third step is melting of water-soluble material (Fig.8). In the Fig. 9, 10 and 11 we can see structures of finished lace, which can be worn in different ways.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Staff of the section EXPO Milano in corporate clothing

In following pictures (Fig. 9, 10 and 11) we can see some moments of use of corporate clothing with the stress on important parts: embroidery I feel Slovenia and air laces as personalised accessory.



Staff of the section EXPO Milano said this about wearing the accessories: "Laces were very noticeable, with the green colour, that symbolizes Slovenia, and its form. Because each lace in the structures represent a story of Slovenia, it has aroused the interest of passers. They are unique and, when wearing lace we were inspired with a sense of elegance and uniqueness."

## 6. Conclusion

Uniforms are part of modern society in many different contexts and play a very important role in nonverbal communication. As corporate clothing at the state level they have to communicate the story of Slovenia.

The requirements were defined clearly and design of corporate clothing with all required dates was the answer to the tender. After the information that the concept submitted had won the tender, the next phases of the development followed.

The design is in accordance with the starting point of the theme of the fair EXPO Milano and the theme of Slovenian pavilion. It is unique and translated in the visual language. Direction of design was based as well on the logo "I feel Slovenia."

Lines and shapes brought an active point of view. Colour combinations brought authority and trusting; colour



Fig.10 Staff of the section EXPO Milano in corporate clothing, Photo: Daniel Novakovič, STA



Fig.11 Staff of the section EXPO Milano in corporate clothing, Photo: Daniel Novakovič, STA

contrasts in green added freshness and the symbolic meaning of green Slovenia. Accessories made with the technique of air lace gave uniqueness, personalisation and symbolic meaning. They tell stories about regions, rivers, forests, Slovenian symbols, cities, population density, local specialties. They are made in innovative ways. Men's accessories, as innovative variations of the tie, and women's accessories also provided unlimited possibilities of wearing. In this case we showed a successful collaboration of the subscriber Spirit Slovenia; who chose the tendering company, who developed and produced corporate clothing *Moda Mi&Lan d.o.o.*; international connections organising by Republic of Slovenia, Government communication office; Studio design and University of Maribor, Faculty of mechanical engineering. Collaboration between these parties allowed a positive flow of knowledge, ideas and experience. The project is also successfully finished when the end users are satisfied. In our case, users gave positive feedback about wearing the uniforms and how they felt when wearing them.

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