

A Visão Sistêmica do *Made in Italy*: um conjunto de princípios inter-relacionados e intangíveis

The Systemic Vision of Made in Italy: a set of interrelated and intangible principles

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Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é investigar a visão sistêmica do conceito *Made in Italy*, como conjunto de princípios e valores (tangíveis e intangíveis) inter-relacionados, orientado para *inward-looking* (foco nas próprias operações) *versus outward-looking* (contexto competitivo) no âmbito do *Design Culture*. Considerado um fenômeno policêntrico, a performance do *Made in Italy* é resultante da conexão entre as empresas e da competência produtiva existente na cadeia de valor, desde a matéria prima até o consumidor final. Assim, atualmente, parece oportuno analisar o *Made in Italy* sob o viés do *Design Culture*, uma vez que há uma modificação em termos qualitativos na maneira como o Design é praticado, circulado e percebido. Neste prisma, o produto de moda é considerado um produto híbrido, no qual os elementos materiais são valorizados em razão da formatação de referências culturais, criativas e comunicacionais. A abordagem de investigação adotada foi sistêmico-construtivista e de natureza qualitativa.

Palavras-chave: *Made in Italy*, Visão Sistêmica, Design de Moda.

Abstract

The objective of this article is to investigate the systemic vision of the Made in Italy concept as a set of interrelated principles and values (tangible and intangible) oriented towards inward-looking (focus on the operations themselves) versus outward-looking (focus on the competitive context) in the scope of Design Culture. Considered a polycentric phenomenon, the performance of Made in Italy results from the connection between companies and the productive competence existing in the value chain, from the raw material to the final consumer. Thus, currently, it seems appropriate to analyze Made in Italy from the perspective of Design Culture since there is a qualitative change in the way Design is practiced, circulated, and perceived. In this prism, the fashion product is considered a hybrid product, in which material elements are valued due to the formatting of cultural, creative, and communicational references. The research approach adopted was systemic-constructivist and of a qualitative nature.

Keywords: *Made in Italy*, Systemic Vision, Fashion Design.





Introduction

Design is seen as a fundamental element in the innovation process and an indispensable resource for inducing competitive strategies, especially in companies that incorporate the Design Culture at the heart of the organization. It plays a crucial role in increasing tacit knowledge and integration among agents in a given context. Therefore, the objective of this article is to investigate the systemic vision of the Made in Italy concept as a set of interrelated principles and values (tangible and intangible) oriented towards inward-looking versus outward-looking in the context of Design Culture. Of course, the present article can only limit itself to posing a few questions in this regard without ever making any claims for them to be exhaustive.

This qualitative research (CRESWEL, 2014; BAUER; GASKELL, 2013; FLICK, 2009; DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006) involves inductive and deductive processes and includes problematization and discussion about Made in Italy and Design Culture (JULIER, 2019, 2017, 2006). The research approach was systemic-constructivist, which provides the basis for a transdisciplinary approach relevant to the current framework of complexity in the area of Design. Consequently, the methodology is composed of Grounded Theory (GLASER; STRAUSS, 2017; CORBIN; STRAUSS, 2015; CHARMAZ, 2014), whose investment as a research reference influences the most important procedure of this method, that is, the stage encoding the data.

In addition to this introduction, the text is organized into four more sections. The fundamentals of the Italian Fashion System are described in the first part of the work. Then, a brief review of the literature on the systemic perspective of Made in Italy is presented. In the third section, the relationship between Made in Italy and Design Culture is exposed. In the last section, the final considerations are highlighted.

The Italian Fashion System

The Italian Fashion System is one of the largest organizations representing the textile and fashion industries in the Western world and a fundamental component of the Italian economic and manufacturing fabric. It is the official interlocutor of national and international institutions and organizations (SMI, 2020). It aims to protect and promote the interests of the sector and contributes to making fashion one of the most economically important areas of the Italian industry. In summary, it aggregates nine sectors of the fashion production chain (Processing and Finishing; Lingerie, Socks, and Beachwear; Clothing Textiles; Men's Fashion; Women's Fashion; Textiles for Interior Design; Miscellaneous Textiles; Children's Fashion; Linen). The Italian production chain is fully present on Italian territory, making a unique case in all of Europe (DUGAN, 2014; FONTANA, 2010).

The literature points out that national and international success, the creativity and flexibility of the competitive base of the Italian Fashion System, with its historical tradition, resulting from the interrelationship among textile companies; clothing and specialized distribution ones that operate together - as a vast laboratory - in the creation, design, and realization of an extensive and innovative series of products (DANESE, 2011; COLAIACOMO, 2006; CURZIO; FORTIS, 2000). In Italy, the textile and fashion sector is characterized by being a group of micro, small,



and medium independent industries, highly fragmented, with a high degree of specialization in various stages of the same production process.

Consequently, Italy presents expressive numbers in the manufacturing sector: it has the third trade surplus in Europe and the fifth globally, thanks to Made in Italy (FNC, 2018). According to Fondazione Nazionale dei Commercialisti reports (2018), exports totaled around 430 billion euros, the trade surplus was 47.5 billion euros, and the manufacturing surplus was 96.7 billion euros in 2017. Small and medium-sized companies made almost 52% of exports. It is important to note that the manufacturing complex, represented by Confindustria Moda, aggregates more than 66 thousand active companies in the country, employs almost 581 thousand workers, and contributes actively to the Italian trade balance surplus, reaching the mark of 62 billion euros in exports (FORTIS, 2019; FNC, 2018).

It can be seen that, in the historical course of the Italian fashion sector, there was a transition from an integrated model of industry, the economy of scale, and maximum efficiency, to a concept of business network, which combines the organizational and production strength with market intelligence in optimizing synergies (LESS-MAFFEI; FALLAN, 2013; MUZZARELLI, 2014; FRISA, 2011; CURZIO; FORTIS, 2000). Thus, the three specific points of the evolution of the Italian Fashion System are (SEGRE REINACH, 2014; LESS-MAFFEI; FALLAN, 2013; RIELLO, 2012; RIELLO; McNEIL, 2010; COLOMBO; CAVALLI; LANOTTE, 2009):

- The 1970s and 1980s corresponded to an embryonic stage, in which "fashion designers/stylists" were the catalysts for transformation in the sector (PAULICELLI, 2014a);
- In the 1990s, there was a phase characterized by joint and fertile development. The fashion designer played an essential role in encouraging the establishment of marketing strategies for the industry. At this point, the production system was distributed, mainly, in industrial districts, in an upstream and downstream supply chain divided into specialized companies (FORTIS, 2016; SAVIOLO; TESTA, 2000);
- Currently, there is an affirmative correspondence between Made in Italy and Italian designer-entrepreneurs with abundant financial resources at their disposal (GODART *et al.*, 2015; VACCARI, 2012).

Therefore, the Italian industrial paradigm presents two crucial points:

- The intimate connection of belonging to the territory, based on an entrepreneurial culture, with shared values and not only on technical know-how, i.e., a robust socio-cultural link between companies and the territorial reality in which they operate facilitates the rapid circulation of ideas, relationships, and products (DURI, 2016);
- A systemic approach in the connective generation between the industries of the productive chain, capable of improving the general efficiency of a district, through the flexibility (of product and/or process) and the immediate reaction to internal and external transformations, elements that make possible the establishment of relationships and interactions between the supply chain and companies (FORTIS, 2019; CIETTA, 2019).

However, in this model, micro and small companies do not have a competitive capacity, based

on price, with large industries that can move their production to countries with low labor costs and, also, may suffer a gradual loss of specialized professionals due to transfers to emerging countries (KAWAMURA, 2015). Thus, the sector adopts new strategies and launches a remarkable profusion of products with innovative design, added value, and technical content to guarantee its position in the market through flexibility, product customization, and excellent conceptual and technical quality in all stages of the design process (design project; manufacture; communication; services). It is noteworthy that Italian competitiveness resides in the relationship between economic and social values, in relation and participatory dynamics, in the culture of citizenship, and the growing number of social enterprises, such as benefit corporations and startups with a social vocation (FONDAZIONE SYMBOLA, 2019).

Paulicelli (2014, p. 159) says that “Italy is and always has been particularly striking on account of this composite identity”. In this sense, it can be said that the productive identity linked to the territory refers to multiple criteria, i.e., from the design of the object, through the quality of the product to a specific productive mode. This is what Bordieu (2011) calls transubstantiation, the centerpiece of symbolic elements, which is measured by the work of a producer whose value is added by his affiliation with a country or locality and by the belief of those consumers who believe in this differential.

Moreover, trends, style, and aesthetics are the foundations of the Made in Italy concept, which, alongside Design, Innovation, and Sustainability, sustain the Italian Fashion System (SMI, 2020). It is indisputable that the development of the Made in Italy brand contributed over time to conceive in the collective imagination a well-defined idea of what the Italian Fashion System is considered, and what the characteristics (legitimacy, authenticity, originality, beauty, and quality) that a product must have to be exported are (FONDAZIONE SYMBOLA, 2019; LUCCHIO, 2017; COLOMBO; CAVALLI; LANOTTE, 2009).

Made in Italy

Paulicelli (2014, p. 164) says that Made in Italy can be understood as a creative and fluid laboratory that reflects the rich and plural identity in hundreds of years of fashion history since countless locations, knowledge, and aesthetic sensitivities make up Italy. Made in Italy is the result of cultural environments from which many cultural objects emerge (KAISER, 2014; BONSIPE, 2011).

It is undeniable that Made in Italy is the driving force of the Italian economy due to its superior creative expression, capable of revealing the origins of a vast natural and cultural heritage, ancient know-how, and a system composed of small producers and/or companies, capable of forming a system that can compete with major global players (SEGRE REINACH, 2011). In short, Made in Italy can be considered the development of innovative capacity and implementation of a competitive strategy by presenting products characterized by quality, creativity, and craftsmanship excellence (FNC, 2018; HERNÁNDEZ, 2018; FORTIS, 2016). Fortis (2016) ensures that the strength of Made in Italy does not only derive the extensive diversification of its specializations, driven mainly by the “4F” macro-sectors (Fashion and cosmetics; Food and wine; Furniture and ceramic tiles; Fabricated metal products, machinery, and transport equipment),

but also by other essential sectors, such as metallurgy, paper, and chemical-pharmaceutical products.

Colombo, Cavalli, and Lanotte (2009) assert that the Made in Italy design is a polycentric, yet unitary phenomenon, a puzzle with many pieces, interspersed with subjective memories of gestures, images, and symbolic values, and it is characterized by cultural and productive excellence in the design of high added value products. It is noticed that there is a good relationship between the development of the Italian economic system and that of the project activities system (CONTI, 2012). Thus, the dynamics of this model is a direct consequence of the intense and profound relationship (of exchange and collaboration) between companies and the productive capacity of high qualitative content in the value chain: from raw material to stylistic range; from technology to final distribution; to the consumer (SEGRE REINACH, 2015). However, in the current competitive and globalized world, international competition has become more complex. The ability to implement innovation and competitive strategies has become crucial in new industrial scenarios (CAPPELLI, 2015). In other words, for the Italian product to be understood in its complexity of value, it is essential to be supported by marketing policies and strategies to respect its identity, its meanings, and values (MORTATI; MAFFEI, 2018; ENGELER, 2017).

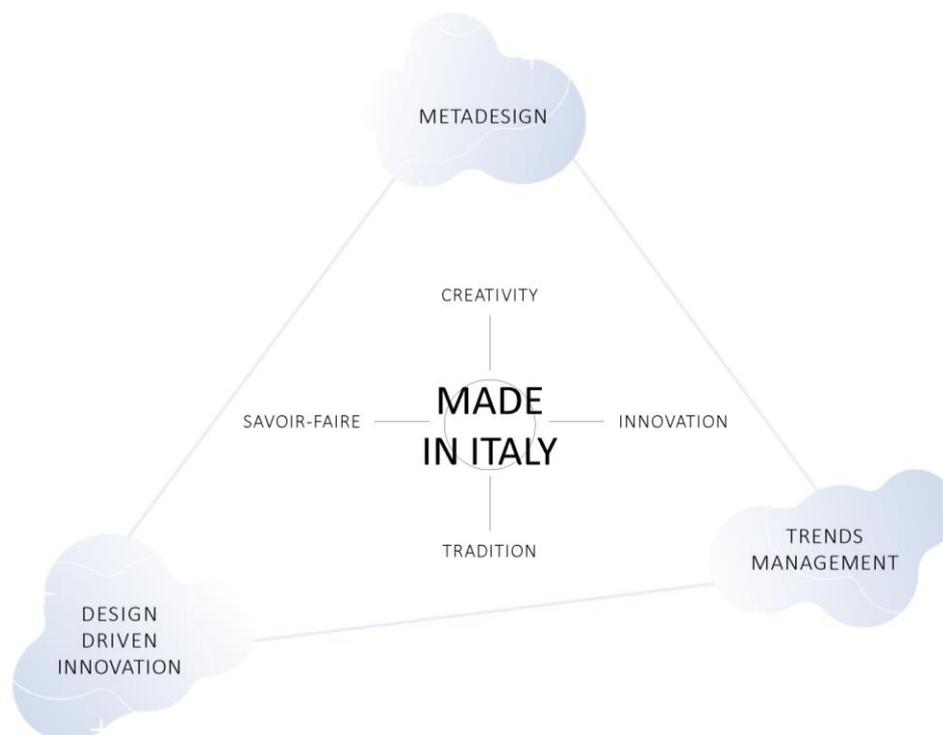


Figure 1. Systemic Vision of Made in Italy. Source: Authors (2020).

Historically, the Made in Italy made it possible to recognize unknown brands in the foreign market due to a kind of controlled designation of origin, attesting to product quality, a mixture of immaterial factors related to the creative process, and tangible elements, referring to the

production process (CONTI, 2012). On the other hand, the Made in Italy has also been used to increase sales in the domestic market, affecting sales of products that do not have the Made in Italy quality seal (CONTI, 2014). Currently, a systemic vision of the Made in Italy concept is perceived as a set of interrelated principles and values (tangible and intangible), which encompass the transdisciplinary activity of metadesign, the management of trends, and the innovation process driven by design (Figure 1). Colombo, Cavalli, and Lanotte (2009) state that Made in Italy is composed of four cardinal points, i.e., a *savoir-faire* linked to tradition, but equally open to creativity and innovation. In reality, the practices of each mode are more complex than is presented here.

On this account, Made in Italy can be considered an open system, a structure sensitive to changes, which responded promptly to events in the sector, not restricted to a label of origin, which would only impoverish its exact value. The system is a multivocal word, and its concept has been changed throughout history. However, in this work, it is used in the sense of its Latin origin *ystema.atis*, which means the interconnection of elements forming a whole, and the Greek *sunistanai*, which means united. It is emphasized that in the case of Made in Italy, the value of the service or good is ordinarily high, as the region makes use of its most significant and invaluable competitive advantage: it is brand as a promising means of export.

Systemic thinking, contrary to mechanistic thinking that considers the physical world separated into parts and reduced to simple units, conceives the world as a complex system composed of integrated elements, which are not limited to the sum of its constituent fractions. Therefore, systemic thinking causes a marked change in the perception of reality. In this process, the whole is highlighted over the parts. It also seeks to perceive the peculiarities present in the details and the dynamics between the elements and the whole (PARABONI; RODRIGUES; SERRANO, 2014). Its core is the systemic organization, which restricts a pattern of interaction in a non-static, but informative way. Systemic thinking presupposes thinking about processes, which configure the existence of the whole. Through them, the reality of a situation or phenomenon to be investigated is realized (PRETO; FIGUEIREDO, 2012).

Vassão (2010) ensures that, from the 20th century onwards, a system's notion began to regulate theoretical propositions about complexity, especially in Morin's work (2015, 2012). Therefore, the social world is perceived as a system, an organized whole, susceptible to remain organized and expand its level of organization. The social subject increases the degree of differentiation and improvement of progressively complex mentalities and behaviors over time. Thus, based on the concepts of creative cities (MACHADO; SIMÕES; DINIZ, 2013; FLORIDA, 2011), it can be said that a systemic response to Italian tourist-cultural clusters can regulate and organize new groupings, using the network's contracts, private/public consortia, to structure the productive-organizational systems in the best way (FNC, 2018; UNCTAD, 2015, 2010).

In this article, clusters are understood as geographical concentrations of organizations and/or institutions linked to each other in a specific area since the proximity of these actors provides competitive and collaborative mechanisms, reinforcing the exchange, innovation, and mutual imitation in the investigation of discernible patterns of quality (PORTER, 2012, 2004). Studies indicate that clusters are crucial in Italy and Spain and that they act with different forces in both (MELO; PAIVA, 2016). Economists point out that the main peculiarity of the productive Italian

model is tacit knowledge, based on local specificities, as it acts as a reservoir of original meanings, in which companies can seek references to support their competitiveness at national and international levels (CIETTA, 2019; BETTIOL; MICELLI, 2005).

Design Culture

According to Segre Reinach (2015), with the beginning of the new millennium, the Design confrontation is imposed in a broader sense. There is the outline of an original path for Design, considering the complexity of the actors involved. In short, the new design and production forms tend to incorporate a significant symbolic component and not just a functional one. It is an intangible added value, which “reflects the complex and articulated overlaps and connections between the systems of fashion, design, architecture, art, and communication” (CELASCHI; CAPPELIERI; VASILE, 2007, p. 69).

Therefore, it is clear that the manufacturing industry is increasingly following the cultural production industry's template, characterized by new formats of consumption and organization of economic activities (KEA; PPI, 2019; KEA, 2009; LASH; URRY, 1994). It has become essential to apprehend the relationships between the individual, his environment (physical and social), and the values that guide his action, determining his identity and belonging to a complex cultural system (BERTOLA *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, it seems appropriate to consider Design Culture as a corollary of current times, as there is a qualitative transformation in the way Design is practiced, circulated, and perceived, due to the role of a common denominator in the creation and articulation of value, in the ordering of informational circulation and constitution of daily practices (JULIER, 2006).

The term Design Culture is not new, but it has consolidated itself in the last decade as an interface between Cultural Studies and the Critical History of Design, especially in Great Britain, Holland, and Finland. It can be considered a scientific category in humanistic studies and contextual interpretation of Design, aiming to interpret Design contextually, given the intertwining of the relationships between formal and informal institutions, market, media, designers, users, and consumers. The current trajectory of Design Culture encompasses complexity and socio-technological ecosystems (JULIER *et al.*, 2019).

Julier (2006, 2000) presents Design Culture as a link that connects the spheres of designers, production, and consumption with the design object, image, or space. It “describes an object, an academic discipline, and a practice” (JULIER, 2017, p.168). Furthermore, it is part of the flows of global culture, and it expresses an attitude, a value, and a desire to improve things. It is located within a network society and is also an instrument (JULIER, 2006). In summary, Design Culture is positioned:

- As a context-informed practice: It refers to the influence of the geographical context in the training and design results in two ways (JULIER, 2006). First, how local resources (availability of materials, technologies, cultural resources, climate) generate particular actions in contrast to globalized practices. Secondly, Design Culture is seen as a platform for communication, through the connection, communication, and legalization of the global



activities of the actors involved;

- As organizational or attitudinal: The focus of Design Culture is connected to the scope of producer-agents of design, not being exclusive to the designers themselves. It is the domain of flexible, horizontally-networked, transaction-rich activities, of which the "creative industries have begun to serve the paradigms for wider shifts in the business organization, both internal and external" (JULIER, 2006, p. 71). Some key-words are team-working, innovation, and creative empowerment;
- As agency: "The emphasis [...] is in Design Culture as a 'way of doing things', but attempts to be active in changing the practices of those outside its stewards" (JULIER, 2006, p.71). Thus, the context is not considered a circumstance, but as data and refers to the improvement of design practice;
- As pervasive but differentiated value: The design provides a label of distinction, and the "Design Culture represents a conceptual breadth that goes beyond traditionally used notions of 'excellence' or 'innovation'" (JULIER, 2006, p. 72);
- As process: "It describes the immediate contextual influences and contextually informed actions within the development of a design" (JULIER, 2006, p. 71). Here, it is crucial to use the expression, in Italian, *cultura di progetto*, considering that the word *progetto* is extended to the real dynamics of design, from conception to its realization (MAFFEI; SIMONELLI, 2002). "Thus, the project process is understood to be produced within and by a network of everyday knowledge and practices that surround the designer" (JULIER, 2006, p. 70).

In historical terms, it is clear that in Italy, the *cultura di progetto* was developed in an original way combined with a centuries-old tradition of craftsmanship excellence, since the success of Italian Design lies precisely in its ability to interpret the needs of users and to conceive contemporary objects that reflect an immaterial desire, in addition to the expression of a style, not only satisfying material or physical conditions (DE FUSCO, 2014; CELASCHI; CAPPELLIERI; VASILE, 2007). Therefore, Design plays an irreplaceable role in the relationship between Italian economic development and its natural creative capacity and the generation of new desirable products/ideas/systems, resulting in a recognizable and difficult to imitate product (DE FUSCO, 2014; FRANZATO; CELASCHI, 2012; BONSIPE, 2011).

Several authors argue that fashion cannot be seen only as an industry, but must be seen as culture, as it transforms the traditional passive relationship (users and products) into a cultural exchange (CIETTA, 2019; VOLONTÉ, 2012, 2009; RICHETTI; CIETTA, 2006; BERTOLA; COLOMBI, 2015). This premise allows an opening in the relationships between the individual, their environment (physical and social), and their values within a complex cultural system. In this view, the fashion product is considered a hybrid product, in which the material elements (fibers, fabrics, clothing) are valued due to the formatting of cultural, creative, and communicative elements - style, shapes, semantic references, cognitive and creative work (DE FUSCO, 2014). Therefore, it is strategic for Italy to link the Made in Italy fashion product to the country's rich artistic and cultural heritage, with culture being the input in the production process and production

costs being considered productive investments (BERTOLA *et al.*, 2016; RICHETTI; CIETTA, 2006).

From these premises, the Made in Italy brand can be linked to the conceptual framework for Design Culture, developed by Julier (2006) and based on the studies by Pizzocarò (2000) and Margolin (1995). This framework makes it possible to reflect on the fashion product's systemic approach, the interrelation between physical and intangible principles, the complexity of the environments, the reception of the design, and the authors involved (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Conceptual framework for Made in Italy and Design Culture. Source: Authors (2020).

The business practice is governed by specific rules and involves the practice of consumption individually, but, equally, socially constituted and observable by the actors of the cultural system. It may include layers, distinct types, and a full spectrum of consumer activities.

The circulation of products sustains and delineates the productive processes of Design Culture, which incorporates available technologies, human and environmental factors, as well as non-material contextual elements “such as existing knowledge networks, legislation, political pressures, economic fluctuations, and fiscal policies” (JULIER, 2006, p. 74). In this context, the differences between the global/local links are essential components within the process. The flow of information downstream is channeled and formatted to streamline movements through the system of provision.



The value of Made in Italy products is determined by the designer, who coordinates material (industrial, commercial, environmental) and immaterial (social, cultural, political, symbolic) processes. It involves the creative action, measurement, and filtering of cultural references to reproduce product nodes and the consequent creation of value of the artifacts.

Finally, it can be ratified that Design Culture demands attention beyond the visual and material attributes regarding the multivarious and multilocational networks of its manifestations. Notwithstanding the inevitably partial nature of this paper, this article has aimed to examine the systemic vision of Made in Italy.

Conclusions

This article perceives the Made in Italy concept as a sum of interconnected fundamentals and values guided by the sphere of Design Culture. It is evident that the theme does not end with this work, but it may be the beginning of a new perspective to be faced in the future. The scope was to provide an initial approach to Made in Italy by correlating factors of the current Design Culture circuit, such as the socio-technological ecosystem, the complexity of the present scenario, the symbolic and functional components, the subjects covered, and the reception of the design. The idea is the continuous affirmation of Made in Italy and the possibility of renewing and representing Italian culture, which originates from the territory, its nature, and all its available tools (creativity, know-how, design culture, social meaning objects, productive capacity, new formats of consumption, and the composition of economic activities).

Made in Italy can be considered an open system whose competitive advantage lies in exact value, in the degree of differentiation, in productive flexibility, in cultural excellence, in the high degree of organization, and the generation of products with high added value. This polycentric phenomenon's performance is the result of the connection between companies and the productive competence existing in the value chain, from the raw material to the final consumer. However, nowadays, it seems appropriate to analyze Made in Italy from the perspective of Design Culture, since there is a qualitative change in the way Design is practiced (business practice), circulated (circulation of products), and perceived (product value). For future research, it is essential to deepen this relationship and to clarify points not worked on in this work.

In conclusion, it can be said that Design Culture is valid for fashion companies, as well as for any strategic sector linked to Made in Italy since it cannot be read and interpreted isolated from the general history of the country and its traditions. It originates from its cultural identity and does not end in the merchandising narrative, which is only a part.

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