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Ecolã Textile Company on the Axis of Culture and Tradition Dialogue Sustained since the 3rd Genera- tion

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Traditional weaving art has been a part of the rich cultural heritage that reflects the identity, essence, tradition, traces of the times and lifestyles of the nations throughout history. With the effect of technological developments in the industrial period, the traditional production method has been replaced by mass production, and weaving has turned into an important industry branch due to its added value, employment and contributions to the country's economy. However, without ignoring the needs of the age, nations continued to protect their own identities, traditional and cultural characteristics, transfer them to original local designs and ensure their sustainability from generation to generation, with the effect of globalization.

The aim of this study is to examine and record the raw material, loom, weaving technique and local product features and fabric design process of Ecolã Textile Company based on traditional craft-based production. In this study, ethnographic research method was used. While the universe of the research is textile companies in Portugal, the sample of the research is Ecolã Textile Company in Manteigas, Portugal. Within the scope of the research, a semi-structured interview form consisting of 29 questions was applied as a data collection tool.

Keywords *Culture, traditional, weaving, design, craft-based*

Introduction

Culture, forms, norms, values, ideas, behaviors, attitudes, etc. It constitutes the social mixed structure that is channeled, developing and changing. At the same time, culture, history, literature, art, design, etc. It also covers various fields (Kroeber, 1952).

White (1940) emphasizes that culture is basically the way of life of human beings. Geertz explains it with a similar approach:

“Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the actually existing network of social relations” (Geertz, 1973).

In another definition, culture is emphasized all the tangible and intangible heritage that people inherit from their ancestors, use, transform, add and transfer to different periods (Firth, 1963).

The art of weaving, which dates back to ancient times, has emerged to meet the needs of protection, dressing, covering and adornment in human life. The art of weaving, which continues to develop day by day, diversified and progressed according to the cultural and local characteristics of each nation, art, design, technical knowledge and ability (Blumenau, 1955; Gürsu, 1988). Traditional weaving art includes the craftsman's tradition, culture and working principle shaped by his instincts. However, with the industrial revolution, a transition was made from the craft stage to the modern industry stage, and differences began to emerge in the traditional production method. An industrial production system with less manpower and more production capacity was adopted in a shorter time (Hamitoğulları, 1982). With John Kay's invention of the "weaving shuttle" in 1733, the weaving process became easier and production accelerated. Progress has been made in the development of weft insertion systems and the mechanisation of looms. In addition, innovations in the field of weaving reached its peak with the invention of automatic shedding systems working with the help of punched cards and the jacquard machine in order to produce complex patterns (Alpay, 1985). These radical technological developments and inventions in the 18th and 19th centuries led to the creation of many new industrial areas, especially the weaving industry. However, although industrial weaving production is fast in terms of time and labor, it has caused the standardization of weaving products (McNeill, 1989/1994).

Keeping up with the returns and conditions of the changing age brings together monotony and alienation from its essence, while meeting on a common ground in the international arena. Today, changes in science, technology and industry affect cultural, social and social life to the same extent. Especially with the effect of globalization, while cultures reach beyond borders,

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it is important for societies to protect and maintain their identity, essence, values, accumulation, tradition, art, cultural heritage and to record them with scientific studies (Başaran, 2018).

This study is important in terms of revealing how the traditional weaving craft of the Portuguese family company is followed in terms of raw materials, weaving production, the preservation of the local cultural characteristics in terms of design, keeping them alive, ensuring their sustainability from generation to generation and transferring the cultural heritage to the international stakeholders. This study was carried out in order to examine the Ecolã Textile Company in Manteigas, Portugal, where the traditional weaving heritage continued since the 3rd generation, and to reveal the raw material, loom, weaving technique, traditional products features, weaving product design process.

Method

In this study, ethnographic research method was used. A comprehensive literature review was conducted in line with the available sources. While the universe of the research is textile companies in Portugal, the sample of the research is Ecolã Textile Company in Manteigas, Portugal. Semi-structured interview technique was used as a qualitative data collection technique was used in this study. In the semi-structured interview technique, questions are asked by the researcher to the person participating in the research, regardless of a certain order. Depending on the flow of the interview, additional questions may be asked by the researcher (Smith, 2003). The interview form consisting of 29 questions was personally applied by the researcher after receiving expert opinion. The interview with António Costa who is Ecolã company authorized was video recorded. The data obtained as a result of the literature review and the interview were evaluated and were explained under appropriate sub-headings.

Findings

It has been made an interview with António Costa in the scope of the research. To briefly mention António Costa, he is 55 years old and graduates Law University in Lisbon-Portugal. He works at Ecolã that is a very small company handicraft based since 2003. He has responsible for commercial issues of the company. His first task is to talk and to organize international clients namely, Japanese, German clients. As a result of the interview with António Costa, the following data were obtained.

Ecolã Textile Company and Its Brand

Ecolã was founded in 1925. It is in Serra da Estrela which is the highest mountain in Portugal (see Figure 1). Ecolã is a handmade



Figure 1. Ecolã textile company (Ecolã Portugal, 2021).

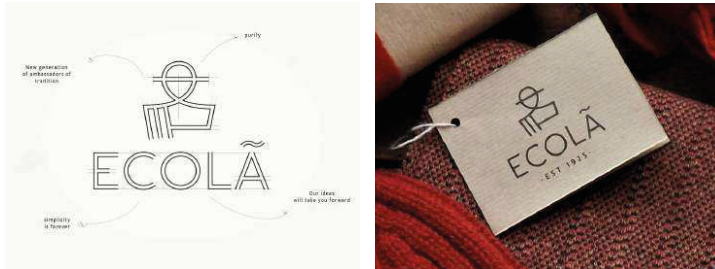


Figure 2. Ecolã brand (Ecolã Portugal, 2021).

certificated third generation family and now, third generation is leading in the company. Ecolã's speciality is following all cycle of the wool since the shearing until the final products. According to people from organization of handicraft certification, this is the oldest family and 100% Portuguese company in Portugal. 20 people work in the company. Two of them are (fourth generation) in the family and the others are Portuguese local people. Ecolã brand identifies the simple and genuine colors of pure sheep wool. And also its brand has ecological label. 4 points have emphasized in the brand: "new generations of ambassadors of tradition", "purify", "simplicity is forever", "our ideas will take you forward". In this way, while respect for Portuguese cultural heritage and the natural elements linked to the Portuguese mountain culture, especially it has been focused future and innovation (see Figure 2).

Raw Material Features

It uses mainly 100% natural wool yarn from the local sheep which is called "Bordaleira Serra da Estrela" (see Figure 3) and "Merino wool" as warp and weft yarn in the products.

The stages of obtaining yarn from wool fiber are as follows:

- 1) Shearing Process: Spring is the right time to shear wool from the sheep to ensure its growth till the following winter. Starting with the legs the wool should be removed in one go.

Approximately 6 kg of wool is obtained from each sheep of which only 3 kg are of fine wool.

- 2) Selection Process: For textiles only the best quality wool is used which comes from the animal's back which is the longest and cleanest. The wool from underneath is very short and the rear area is very dirty (see Figure 4).
- 3) Spinning Process: Spinning can be done with a manual or electric spindle which transforms the wool into yarn, twisting it to obtain yarn of the desired thickness. It is used 100% natural wool as raw material both warp and weft yarn. Especially it should use "Bordaleira Serra da Estrela" for making good Burel quality (see Figure 5).

Figure 3. Bordaleira Serra da Estrela (local sheep) (Ecolã Portugal, 2021)



Figure 4. Shearing and selection process (Ecolã Portugal, 2021)



Figure 5. Transform wool into yarn (Spinning Process) (Ecolã Portugal, 2021)

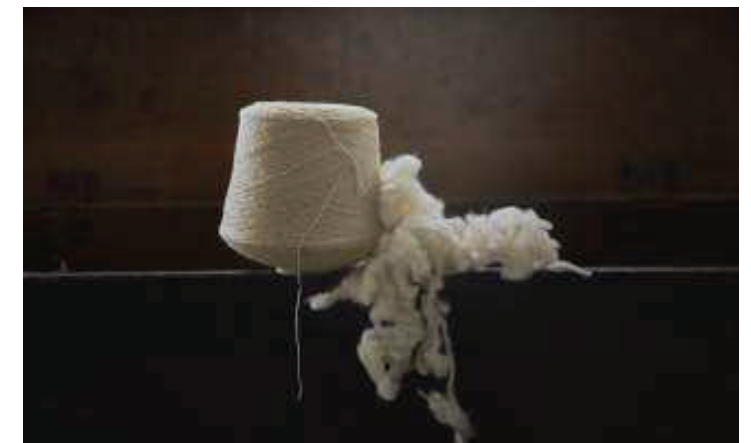




Photo 6. Weaving Process (Ecolã Portugal, 2021)

Loom Features

There are 16 weaving machines in the company. While some of them are Gripper machines, the others are Lucas shuttle looms in the company. They are very old models which are in 1940-1950. Gripper (half manual- half electronic) machine that is worked by punchcard and one shuttle of loom. Punchcard can be reuseable for 3 or 4 years. When the punchcard is destroyed, it has been needed to use new punchcard. The gripper loom models are "Sulzer", "Somet" and "Nuevo Pignone Smit". The shuttle loom "Lucas" was produced in Covilhã (see Figure 6). It is used Only plain weave and twill as weaving technique in the fabrics. The weaving process is listed below (see Figure 6).

Finishing Process

Dying process is made outside of the company. After weaving it is used ironing brush to become softer. But Burel fabric doesn't need to finishing process. According to the final function of the product it is made finishing.

Product Features

Ecolã company has two main product dimensions that are home textile and fashion- accessories. Various products are made like burel fabrics, handmade carpets, curtains, bedcovers, throws, blankets, woman clothes (coat, vest, poncho, cloak), man clothes (coat, vest, cardigan, jacket, cloak, blazer), bags, backpacks, leggings, mittens, caps, shawls, slippers, scarfs, baby bags, baby blankets etc. Ecolã company produces a special woven product called Burel. Burel is a traditional Portuguese fabric made from 100% pure sheep wool, always connected to Region of the Serra da Estrela (highest mountain in Portugal), mountains and shepherds with their handmade covers. The authenticity of the Burel is a result of a specific sequence of operations in the manufacturing process. The wool after being sheared, washed, spun and woven in a loom of shuttle, is pounded and scalded on a machine called "Pisão". This operation "pisoar" transforms the tissue in Burel and ensures the genuine and unique characteristics of this fabric: strength and high resistance against cold and



Figure 7. Burel fabric (Ecolã Portugal, 2021)

rain. Burel is not felt. Because burel fabric is weaved and also can reverse same shape when you use force, but felt doesn't reverse same shape. Also Burel is a Portuguese method to make what a improve wool. There are similar materials in the northern of Austria, Italy and France. Burel is a life-time investment for it is a natural wool as a material. It is used local sheep type as wool (see Figure 7).

Design Features and Design Process

The used patterns in fabrics are the tweed, herringbone, checks, stripes, and diamond. The major part is based on the regional patterns. It doesn't make triangle, floral, cycle motif by reason of limitation of weaving system (see Figure 8). The patterns preferred by international customers Mr. Costa expresses it as follows:

Figure 8. The Losa pattern, a diamond shape style (Ecolã Portugal, 2021)



"I don't know why stripes do not prefer by France. Another example is Japan clients prefer minimalistic shape pattern and multi-functionism like origami. German clients prefer functional based fit simple designs instead of pattern, otherwise Italian clients prefer oriental pattern." (A. Costa, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

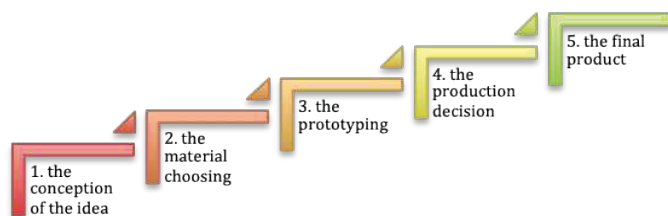
It is still using patterns since the beginning of the company. For new markets such as Germany, Japan, even Italy from time to time it is made new models. People in the factory have skills with to making and creating new models. Also, designers are sometimes worked with for new designs. It is worked with designers such as Thomaz Bondioli (Brazilian Designer) and Fernando Pedro (Portuguese Designer) for mainly making new products (e.g. one clothes and table for office). 4 or 5 years ago it has been worked with Nele De Block who is a Belgian Designer to make accessories and clothing that is ecological and minimalist design. They come to the factory and stay for 1 or 5 days when collaborating with the designers. The following points are taken into consideration during the design process. The fabric design process consists of five important stages: the conception of the idea; the material choosing; the prototyping; the production decision and the production itself (see Figure 9). Products are customized according the client needs and market trends.

Color Features

Usually it is preferred the natural colours of the typical sheep of the region, "Bordaleira Serra da Estrela" which is white, beige, brown. Since 1925 it is used dyed colours with a ecological certification Ecotex 100. Ecotex stylizes minerals and vegetables, not chemicals. Mr. Costa also states below that they can make different colors in accordance with customer demands.

"Besides, we can do customized colors. For example if the clients want to make 50 meters color, we can do special colours for the clients. According to my experience, Portuguese people prefer all the colours, but I can say you we sell blue blankets in France; a lot of natural colours products (white, beige, brown) in Germany; po-

Photo 9. Fabric design process



werful colours products (strong red, pink, yellow) in Italy. Also Israel is new market this year when started to sell products. Israel clients prefer conservative colors (white, beige, brown). The reasons for that are the marketing tendencies. Normally, German people are related to less-fashionable products. Because they want very useful things. If we go to Italy, we can discuss with a man about blue colour of belt should be same colour with trousers. It depends on product. Each country has its culture. In my opinion, all the fashion level and fashion people are the same everywhere. Even in Turkey you can find very well designers, you do not know if it German, French, Dutch. It is part of the my job to understand different cultures." (A. Costa, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

Conclusion

Ecolã Textile Company is based on traditional craft-based production, because is related with its background and with its production. products are exported Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Israel (New Market), Spain, Switzerland, Austria, The United Kingdom. Mr. Costa explains the success of the company in the national and international arena as follows:

"The quality of raw material and relation quality-price are the key of our success. First, from shearing to selection is the most important part for the quality of raw material. Second, it is quality of the weaving. You should do width density. Third is good commercial. Listen your clients for expectation client. For example, if you send an email in the morning, normally you will answer at the end of the day. To be available is rule of the market. We have a high level customers loyalty for those reasons. Also, we created a brand Ecolã (eco-wool) based on a local product, which is the wool from the Bordaleira sheep of Serra da Estrela. Yes, we have Portugal company since 1962 or 1964 in Portugal market and my German client we work with us for 14 years and also my Japanese client since 2008 in International market." (A. Costa, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

As a result, to be privileged and have a say in the national and international arena, it is extremely important to be able to make cultural-local design and production, to protect and maintain the originality, provided that the characteristics of the traditional craft are adhered to. In addition, transferring cultural characteristics to contemporary weaving designs without ignoring customer and market expectations is another important issue. It is recommended that national and international projects, academic and sector collaborations be carried out in various regions to obtain sustainable and nature-friendly textile products, to revive local weaving activities, to produce them in accordance with the original.