

# Fabrics, fashion and bodies. Dress for sports

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## Introduction

Design is a discipline that operates culturally. Thus, the designer is recognized as an operator concerned with the analysis of the cultural events in which he develops; and busy identifying questions that bring him closer to the needs of a specific user and then finding the most effective ways to respond to specific problems. Thus, it is about knowing and understanding the user in depth to be relevant to them in a proposal with meaning and purpose.

In this context, designers find themselves in the need to interpret an essentially dynamic market and it is precisely this dynamism that keeps us motivated to constantly question ourselves about our practice. What other task should a designer have if it is not essentially to constantly question oneself, and from there solve the user's problems with effective design solutions?

We live in a "fluid, light and mobile" world defined by Gilles Lipovetsky as "Of Lightness". According to Lipovetsky, contemporary society is characterized by constant change, an acceleration of the pace of life and a multiplicity of available options. This context promotes a mentality oriented towards the search for novelty, flexibility and adaptability. Lipovetsky argues that this lightness is reflected in various areas of modern life, from fashion and consumption to interpersonal relationships and lifestyle. He highlights how technology and globalization have contributed to this transformation, allowing for greater mobility, instant communication, and access to real-time information. This unprecedented lightness and fluidity, according to Lipovetsky, influences the way we live, think and relate to the world.

In this context defined as "fluid, light and mobile", the fashion system is revolutionized and the field of study expands, generating new horizons as well as new challenges in design as a profession. In the last decade, in the field of sports clothing design specifically, the evolution has been enormous and in this sense, several factors have influenced. For some years now, I have personally dedicated myself to studying and reviewing the factors that reflect the changing demands of users as a way of identifying specific needs and then trying to respond to specific design problems. For example, technological advances and cultural trends and lifestyles that make my professional and academic practice also dynamic and especially interesting.

The objective of this work is to problematize, based on Lipovetsky's theoretical framework, the relationship between fabrics, fashion and bodies: that is, specifically to explore the benefits of technical fabrics, and their impact on the adaptation of sports clothing to the different types of bodies. In this sense, certain questions arise: how does design evolve, recognizing that bodies, being diverse, have different mobility capacities? Understanding that sports practice requires a series of movements specific to each sport, we ask ourselves, How does the choice of fabrics impact the design for bodies with different abilities or sizes, recognizing that they move in different ways during the practice of a sporty activity?

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Some of the most significant specific factors in the sports industry that reflect new demands are related to advances in materials and technology that have revolutionized the design of sports clothing. New technical fabrics have been developed that offer not only features such as breathability, elasticity, water and wind resistance and compression and moisture management properties. But technologies such as 3D printing and the integration of motion sensors have also been incorporated, which has allowed more functional and personalized designs. Another factor to highlight has been the focus on performance and comfort. Users look for sports clothing that improves their performance and provides comfort during sports practice. In this sense, textile innovations make a difference. There are fabrics designed to obtain the optimal thermal balance, keeping the body dry and protected from inclement weather. Others are designed to provide comfort by optimizing adjustments and giving freedom of movement. Sports fabrics stimulate and promote the confidence of athletes, while providing a more satisfying and effective sports experience. With the help of textile innovations, the design of the clothing has focused on providing a precise fit, adequate ventilation and support where necessary. Ergonomics and biomechanics have also influenced the design of garments that adapt to the movements of the body, the abilities and limitations of athletes, while improving efficiency, comfort, safety and athletic performance.

In response to the growing demand for an improved user experience, wearable technology has begun to be incorporated into the design of sportswear. For example, when it comes to advances applied to the design of yoga clothing, garments with specific characteristics have been developed to improve the experience and performance of the practitioner. For example, garments that include built-in motion sensors to provide real-time feedback on posture and alignment, heart rate monitoring, breathing and relaxation tracking. In this sense, Wearable (illustration 1) Today, the most innovative companies are those that combine design and technology to create a better quality of life through clothing and experience.

The need to use fabrics or resources that adapt to the diversity of bodies and sporting abilities in sport is vital to guarantee the comfort, freedom of movement and confidence of athletes, regardless of their shape, size, characteristics or possibilities of use, physical mobility. The diversity of bodies and abilities of each athlete must be considered and addressed in the sports clothing industry, and this includes the

design of specific garments for the requirements of each case, each sport or sports practice.

The manufacture of fabrics that adapt to all types of bodies also reflects a special need to think about the inclusion and acceptance of diversity. Indeed, sportswear design has evolved towards greater diversity including, in addition to a variety of sizes, cuts, fits and adaptability, more personalization and representation celebrating individuality. These changes reflect a growing understanding that sports are for everyone, regardless of body size or abilities, and seek to promote inclusion and body acceptance in the sports industry.

This is one of the topics where I focus my interest, working on the design of garments that enable sports practice by responding to the individual needs of users: I developed this aspect by addressing issues related to identity, diversity and inclusion collaborating with Club Atlético Atlas designing a series of soccer jerseys for the blind that were used by “Los Murciélagos”, the Argentine 5-a-side Soccer Team for the blind. A project where design is located as a discipline that can be at the service of the realization of a dream by redefining the bond with users. It was an experience in which I established an emotional connection with the players, while at the same time I experienced the practice of designing as a way of operating, generating a certain “disability reduction” and celebrating the diversity of bodies and their possibilities of movement through despite his physical limitations. The shirt displayed the name and number of each player in 3D, as well as the sponsors in Braille. Likewise, it included a QR code that, when scanned, the user - player or supporter - heard the story of the beginning and evolution of football for the blind in Argentina. Each jersey had the character of a unique piece as each player is unique. (Illustration 2) “The Bats” soccer players – like bats – can “fly” without seeing.

As far as my academic work is concerned, I direct postgraduate projects in the Sports Apparel Design Update Program at the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Urbanism of the University of Buenos Aires. I want to highlight a project developed within the framework of the postgraduate program, which refracts the lights of specific needs in the sports industry, according to sports practices that arise as a result of cultural trends and lifestyles of today, and this is the case of a collection of ballet fit clothing<sup>1</sup> featured in 2021 by Denise Afonso Costabile. In this project, the design of pieces for a population of women of varied physical conditions and sizes whose proposal focuses on facilitating posture correction stands out. The success also lay in proposing designs with fabrics that allowed easy mobility without restricting the range of motion, while offering comfort and support during practice. For post-practice, the collection included a hybrid and versatile dual-function garment, redefining the morphological structure of the so-called jacket-poncho. to use as a coat while maintaining body heat or as a waterproof protector. (Illustration 3)

It is clear that the possibilities of dressing for sports are endless. Considering bodies with varied and unique capacities and abilities

<sup>1</sup>Ballet fit is a form of exercise inspired by classical ballet. It combines ballet movements with fitness exercises and elements of strength and flexibility training to create a more accessible and beneficial form of exercise for the body. The goal of ballet fit is to improve posture, tone muscles, increase flexibility and develop endurance. It is often performed to classical ballet music and may involve barre, floor and center exercises tailored to people of all skill and experience levels. Is a Popular option for those who want to experience the benefits of ballet in their physical state, without needing previous dance experience.

can be one of the first steps to begin to review our practices<sup>2</sup> and then expand our creative horizon. Exploring the benefits of technical fabrics and their impact on the design of sports clothing for a growing demand for diverse needs is vital as a way to respond to a dynamic market that increasingly tends towards inclusion and acceptance of diversity.

Certainly, far from proposing to find closed answers, this work aims to open the game to a space for debate in this sense and shed light from a search that is “fluid, light and mobile”, and susceptible to being revised as new alternatives emerge. As possible design solutions to specific requirements.<sup>1-13</sup>

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## Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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<sup>2</sup>The jacket-poncho is a garment that combines characteristics of a jacket and a poncho. This garment is appreciated for its versatility, as it combines the comfort and relaxed style of the poncho with the functionality and practicality of a jacket. It is a kind of hybrid between both garments, designed to provide comfort and style. A poncho jacket is typically shaped like a poncho, meaning it is sleeveless and draped over the shoulders as a loose cape. However, unlike a traditional poncho, a poncho jacket usually has a front opening with a zipper or buttons, similar to those that would be found on a conventional jacket. This allows it to be opened and closed to adjust the garment according to the needs of each person. The poncho jacket can be made in a wide variety<sup>2</sup>of materials, from light and breathable fabrics to warmer and more sheltered options. Some poncho jackets may also have built-in hoods to protect the head in case of rain or wind.