



Young fashion made in Egypt

Messe Berlin and sequa launch training for young designers



The challenge

Barbara Mabrook of the trade fair organiser Messe Berlin and Head of Bazaar Berlin is puzzled. 'Egypt produces top-quality cotton that weavers in Cairo and Alexandria turn into the finest cloth. And many women still possess the unique and age-old embroidery skills to turn it into stunning garments. Yet for many years, Egyptian exhibitors at Bazaar Berlin – Europe's largest fair for high-quality fashion from developing countries and emerging economies – have been showing cheap, poor-quality clothing and trinkets based on Ancient Egyptian motifs that nobody wants to buy,' she says.

This paradox is also evident in Egypt's textile and clothing industry, which is one of the most important sectors of the country's economy. The clothing sector employs many thousand people and manufactures clothing for major global chains. Yet it always produces to the designs dictated by these international players – Egypt has no tradition of exporting its own fashions.

'This project has enabled us to showcase high-quality independent fashion from Egypt. We are promoting an ethno-design breakthrough that will boost Egypt's reputation as a fashion centre. The Allaga label is based on hand-made clothing, rather than mass production, and that is enhancing our image.'

Barbara Mabrook, Head of Bazaar Berlin

'Egypt is in an excellent position to develop a creative fashion industry' reflects Barbara Mabrook. The country has a tradition of producing handicrafts that dates back centuries, and the wide range of materials and traditional decorative elements are perfectly suited to an indigenous fashion and design industry. However, Egypt lacks designers able to produce independent fashions that combine modern styling with traditional influences – and to showcase and market their ranges strategically.

The solution

Barbara Mabrook explains the idea behind the project: 'Through the German Chambers of Commerce network and the public-benefit body Global Project Partners, we have a good network in Egypt, so we came up with the idea of training designers so that retailers could once again sell high-quality Egyptian fashion.' To put the idea into practice, Messe Berlin and sequa embarked on a develoPPP.de project. The develoPPP.de programme is implemented by sequa on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and supports sustainable business initiatives by companies. Global Project Partners, meanwhile, made contacts with a private fashion college, the Burgo Fashion Center. The initial develoPPP.de project, which ran until late 2013, saw the partners launch a training course in ethnic product design. The best trainee designers were then able to showcase their work at Bazaar Berlin. 'Feedback from retailers and consumers was particularly important for the students, who were able to adapt their fashions to European tastes the following year,' says Mabrook.



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During the course, the idea emerged of creating the college's own fashion label. To be a commercial success, the brand needs jewellery and accessories as well as clothes, so the partners have embarked on a second development partnership, which is also set to develop new marketing channels within Egypt and in Europe.

Our services

Since 2010, the Burgo Fashion Center has been training design students in ethnic product design. The training runs for 20 weeks and comprises 40 separate courses, each taught for three hours. Trainers and students work together to create shirts and blouses, trousers and dresses, but this is not merely an academic exercise: the clothes also have to be marketed. So it was important for the students to be able to exhibit their work at Bazaar Berlin and gain the experience that led to the launch of the 'Allaga' range – the word means 'chic' in Arabic. The Allaga label really took off in its third year, 'and within just a few days, the pieces had sold out,' recalls Barbara Mabrook. It was a success for Bazaar Berlin, too. These high-quality, hand-made fashions have enabled the fair to attract and retain customers and exhibitors and enhanced its reputation as the only trade fair to showcase top-quality fashion from Africa, Asian and Latin America.

Mabrook is delighted that the young Egyptian designers are now designing jewellery and accessories to complement their fashion ranges. The cotton and wool garments they produce are out of the ordinary: the designers use exclusively locally-produced, high-quality fabrics and turn them into quality garments. They work with groups of women who have skills in traditional craft embroidery, making each garment unique. This is boosting incomes in rural areas, an important objective for the development partnership. Meanwhile, the young designers are marketing their clothing, jewellery and accessories across the country through Fairtrade Egypt and national trade fairs, where their ranges also sell extremely well.

Impacts and results

- The Burgo Fashion Center has so far trained 120 design students in ethnic product design. 21 students join the programme each year.
- This cooperation has produced a successful fashion range, which is now being expanded into a new fashion label. The best trainee designers showcase their work at Bazaar Berlin.
- Growing demand shows that there is a market both in Europe and within Egypt for clothing that combines high-quality fashion with traditional handicrafts. Meeting this demand is creating additional income opportunities for weavers and embroiderers in rural areas of Egypt.
- Messe Berlin benefits in a number of ways. It now offers not only fashion boutiques and retail outlets but also end-consumers unique, high-quality fashions at affordable prices.
- Messe Berlin is also strengthening its image as the leading provider of fashion from developing countries and emerging economies.

At a glance

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| Duration | 24 October 2011 to 30 November 2013 and 15 May 2014 to 31 December 2016 |
| Country | Egypt |
| Objective | Establishing a design training course and a new fashion range, 'Allaga'. |
| Partners | Messe Berlin and sequa |
| Results | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More than 120 design students have received training.• Jobs have been created for weavers and embroiderers in rural areas of Egypt.• Cooperation between trainers and design students has produced a successful fashion range.• Bazaar Berlin is enhancing its image as the leading trade fair for fashion from developing countries. |

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