

# New roads in the enlargement of contemporary collections: Street Fashion Budapest archive

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## Abstract:

This paper explores the Street Fashion Budapest online project, which was created in 2010, explaining the project's background, contributors, methodology, successes and challenges. Through this case study it considers the complex issue of collecting contemporary dress and suggests the value of an approach like SFB while honestly representing the challenges faced by such a project.

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## Street Fashion Budapest's background

Thanks to the technological developments of the past decade, the number of Internet users is growing by the day, and the contents available on the World Wide Web, as well as collective sites keep increasingly large audiences coming online more frequently and for longer periods of time than ever before.

Museums have felt compelled to respond to this phenomenon by setting up various online channels themselves. Building a representative, regularly updated website, and retaining a presence and communication on group pages, thereby forming a micro-community and a group of followers, has become an issue of vital importance even to the most renowned, conservative establishments.

Kiscelli Museum's Street Fashion Budapest (SFB) project was created in 2010 as an experimental pilot project in the framework of MADOK, a programme launched for the documentation of the present. It comprises an online archive created like the wikinomic systems by private individuals. Consequently, the images and the information provided, as well as the personal information given at the time of registration, that are uploaded to [www.streetfashionbudapest.hu](http://www.streetfashionbudapest.hu) ultimately become valuable contributions to this archive. Everyone can share as much data as they wish, but as we saw with the Street Fashion Museum exhibition we organised in 2012, the more information people provide the more interesting and useful the "collection" they publish will be.



Photo: Judit Fáyryné Szalatnyay, Kiscelli Museum

### **Which people are the focus of the project? Who is involved?**

The project focused on those people active in online life spending more and more time in collective sites every day. People for whom fashion is like a form of identity and self-presentation. SFB is especially popular in Hungary among 16-25 year old fashion followers. The page has also gained a reputation in the local fashion professionals' circle. Besides sharing, it gives the opportunity to showcase professional practice. During the last five years photography students, students of liberal arts, economic sciences and communication studies contributed to the page as bloggers, photographers and project assistants. SFB is

also attractive for other professional partners who work in the fashion business. To be honest the project was much more appreciated by the fashion world than by museologists.

### **What is the aim of SFB? What is the difference between worldwide street fashion pages and SFB?**

The international street fashion websites (lookbook.nu, chictopia) began with an economic impetus, rather than the idea of researching and preserving data for the future. However following their development, their work and experiences were very useful in building SFB. They helped us learn about structure and community building strategies. When we drew up the structure of our site, the main point was that sending information should be fast and easy. The aim of SFB is recording the average people's dressing habits using our own database as a reference point for research into contemporary street wear.

Out of the online content our other goal was to include other ways of gathering information (audiovisual and 3D objects). To that end, we made personal "in depth" interviews with selected individuals, asking about their dressing and shopping habits, and their familial background. These interviews also included a visit to their wardrobe. Over a period of time and depending on financial possibilities, or as a result of the "donations" of the interviewee, the textile collection is expected to grow.

A crucial criterion for the development of such kind of an archive is that the greatest possible number of potential informants get to know about it. To that end, the project has organised, with the help of volunteers, some extremely "now" community-building actions borrowed from street fashion sites and blogs.

### **How did SFB become popular?**



Photo: SFB

Next to traditional communication strategies we borrowed recruiter tactics from well-known international and local fashion blogs.

- We organised competitions offering prizes like fashion garments and free admission to attractive fashion events
- We organised street fashion photoshootings by students from MOME (University of Applied Arts of Budapest). This gave us the images to upload to the SFB's gallery, but also fulfilled other sociological interests, like the whole day shooting at Nyugati tér (a very well known transport hub in Budapest), where we asked passers-by to be our models.
- We often went to summer festivals like SZIGET and Balaton Sound. We consider it important to enhance the offline presence
- We chose the *Faces of SFB* in 2010, 2011 and 2013. We took photos of them with the help of professional photographers and the pictures were published in the pages of the most famous Hungarian women's magazines like Glamour, Marie Claire and InStyle Hungary
- We launched *What's in your bag?* game, which was also popular on Facebook. More than 70 people (mainly girls) showed and described their bag's contents.



Photo: SFB

- One of our most interesting games was *SFB loves Ómama*, where we asked our community to scan and upload photos from their family albums. More than 200 people played for valuable vintage garments.
- *Follow me* was a milestone event in the life of the SFB project. A 100 of the most stylish participants of the page were presented at the biggest street fashion show ever in the heart of the city of Budapest in 2011.

- We made two events, which helped to enhance the museological context of the SFB project. We organised the *SFB Conference* with the participation of one of the world's most well-known street fashion photographers Yvan Rodic/The Facehunter and we invited Agnes Rocamora and Djurdja Bartlett, two researchers of the field from London College of Fashion.
- Furthermore we made an exhibition: *Street Fashion Museum – street fashion at the past and present*

## **SFB in numbers**

Up to June 2015 the archive has gained 3860 pictures, 3678 participants and more than 23.000 Facebook followers. This stands in comparison to the 1800 followers of the Kiscelli Museum itself. Our page is visited by mainly girls between 18 and 24 years old. We have more female participants than male. Our eldest user is 59 years old, the youngest is 13. It's interesting that from the more than 3000 Facebook followers from foreign countries the largest number is from South Korea. But SFB is also visited from the UK, Romania, Germany, Thailand, Slovakia and the United States. I need to add that almost 80% of these results were reached in the first three and a half years.

The stagnancy of the last one and the half years is due to the lack of human and financial resources. To sustain the interest in the project the museum would need one full time employee (until the beginning of 2014 this was me) who looks after every activity; recruits volunteers and controls their work, figures out the next online and offline activities, negotiates and organises them. This person needs to have both the qualities of a professional researcher curator, and of a communication and financial manager, and furthermore of a social media expert. If the museum doesn't have such kind of a person, it is possible to do the same work with a small staff who manage all the emerging tasks. This staff and the continuous development of the project and the site however needs permanent financial funding. Unfortunately the museum could enjoy the auspicious benefit of money for the first year only.

## **What are the main advantages of the contemporary collecting?**

Information comes at the same time and first hand, from the wearers themselves. In this way, these are correct and reliable. The museum can have a constant dialogue with the wearers, it can build a new community. Another positive aspect of the online enrichment of the collection is that it is always accessible and can be further developed anytime. Attitudes to collecting have changed during the past 200 years, but a constant however is that collections continue define the identity of museums. It's mistakenly thought that a museum is a stock of old things. Collecting and documentation of the present and the future were always part of the museum's strategy: researching the present is a conscious choice.

- For who and where do we collect contemporary material?
- How can we decide what is worthy preserving?
- Will it be enough for the future researching?

It's hard to answer these questions, These aspects keep changing in connection with the obstacles, questions and technical opportunities. Digital archives and stocks of 3D objects have the same position in this respect. Next to objects (sometimes instead of them), documentations, films and photos, personal stories will also provide the basis of future

researching. Like oral history, personal stories of the present take over the role of preserving the past. The traditional canonizing role of museums alters over time. Uploading, sharing, writing comments happen at the same place through these interfaces. We transcend the past with the age of the uploaded garments: second-hand clothes, flea market things and wearing our mother's old pieces become real, relevant and valuable for SFB. The SFB project and the enlargement of the collection have been sustained by PR and communication work, community sales, and professional events during the past four years.

### **The advantages of contemporary collecting on display - The Street Fashion Museum exhibition**

At the exhibition we demonstrated our idea about the beneficial effect of contemporary collecting through two main display techniques. One of them was to present past and present picture pairs. Observing the interesting and often amusing connection between the two photographs, visitors could compare the quantity of data we can gain in both cases. The old photographs came from the very interesting database of [www.fortepan.hu](http://www.fortepan.hu), which is also an online photo archive with a different but very successful working system.



Society, around 1922–1923

Photo: [fortepan.hu](http://fortepan.hu)

[Sofiya](#), 20

Photo: [streetfashionbudapest.hu](http://streetfashionbudapest.hu)

Date: 27/05/2011

Place: Vác

Style: depends on my mood

Hat: vintage

Trousers: Mexx, 2009

*Boots: Italy, about 10 years old, my sister bought them abroad*  
*Blouse: vintage, my mother bought it years ago*  
*Occupation: student, photographer, and stylist, as well as blogger*  
*Favourite brand: Theyskens Theory*  
*Favourite store: Zoe Phobic Showroom*  
*Favourite music: Placebo*  
*Favourite book: Jeffrey Eugenides: The Virgin Suicides*  
*Favourite film and television programme: Marie Antoinette; What not to wear*  
*Favourite place of entertainment: still looking for it*

Fortepan relies on the volunteer work of editors and helpers. If somebody wishes to enrich the collection they cannot upload photos; they have to contact the organisers and give them the albums and they will scan and upload it. In the case of fortepan.hu the photos themselves are of very high quality, but the researcher or visitor has to add the information themselves. With the SFB we already have some useful and interesting data for almost all images. Next to the uploaded photos, we can see the place and date of the shooting, the style of the dress, where these garments came from and personal information about the wearer (like age, occupation, favourite brands, music, books and clubs). These are interesting in connection from the point of view of both sociology and consumption research.

The quantity of the explanatory text was a visual reinforcement of the idea and our goal. The other main display technique was exhibiting the dresses. We used a special floating system. Visitors could manipulate the mannequins and take into their hands the copy of the original catalogue card. This personal activity and the opportunity to see behind the scenes of the curator's work resulted in a more intensive, more subjective reception.

In the case of the dresses visitors could also see the difference of the quantity of data we have on the one and the other side. With all the information furnished by the curator from the old garments (professional description of the dress, the measurements, the descriptions of materials and techniques, and also pictures which demonstrated the analogies for the dating) we still have much less information than in the case of the nine outfits shown from the SFB' Faces 2010, where we had photos and the inventory from their wardrobe, street fashion photos of the person wearing those clothes, and the in-depth interviews.



Photo: Vivienne Balla





Photo: SFB

**Viki MONHOR, 23, *The bicycle-compatible oddball***

*„As far as clothes go, I don't try and force it, the main thing for me is to feel good in my own skin"*

*Style: Depending on my mood (retro, casual, extreme, underground)*

*Photo: Vivienne Balla*

*Date: 11. December, 2010*

*Place: Budapest*

*Pullover: Second-hand, 500HUF*

*„Hat": I swapped it*

*Tighs: Calzedonia*

*Shoes: Present from my mum*

*Occupation: I graduate this year from ELTE (Budapest University) in art history*

*Favourite brand: Don't have one, my favourit pieces are little treasures found at annual trash clearings and second-hand stores*

*Favourite music: None, I often listen to Radio TILOS (independent Budapest radio), I love all kind of music: electronic,- minimal, dubstep, drum and bass – hip-hop, rap, alternative, classical...*

*Favourite book: None neighter, I love Flowers of Evil by Charles Baudelaire, my favourite is A Carcass*

*Favourite film and television programme: I don't have a favourite movie (there are a lot, which I like: Sin City, David Lynch Inland Empire, The Fall...) I don't have a TV*

*Favourite place of entertainment: None. I love open-air parties, in the woods, etc., but I rarely go*

**Wardrobe**

Coats: 7

Jackets: 8

Cardigans: 5

Vests: 5

Pullovers: 20

Long sleeved T-shirts: 8

T-shirts: 36

Shirts: 35

Trousers: 19

Shorts: 2

Underwear: 16

Tank tops: 17

Pyjamas: 3

Socks: 14

Swimming trunks: 5

Shoes: 16

Bags: 7

Belts: 10

Scarves: 8

Hats: 3

Gloves: 3

Watches: 2



Photo: Vivienne Balla



Photo: SFB

**Kati SÜLE, 56**

*Creative ecodesigner, stylist*

*„Dressing is a necessity. If you have to do it everyday, then let it be fun! For me dressin is an art.”*

*Style: creative, I am open to all kind of styles.*

*My clothes reflect my personality*

*Photo: Vivienne Balla*

*Date: 11. December, 2010*

*Place: Pollack Mihály Square, Budapest*

*Coat: Vintage 40's, it was given to me by my friend, who bought it in an antique store*

*Trousers: Outlet/Vienna, 20 Euro*

*Cardi: Grey cotton with frills, second-hand, 500 HUF*

*Top: Sleeveless black cotton top with grey frills/ second-hand, 500 HUF, frills are my own design/Skardress*

*Shoes: Zara, repainted, sale, 6000 HUF*

*Bag: Colour transition laque/Pull&Bear, 4000 HUF*

*Necklace: Own design*

*Occupation: Since 2006 fashion and clothes redesigner, blogger, persnal stylist, wardrobe refresh advisor*

*Favourite brand: Japenese designer*

*Favourite music: Free jazz*

*Favourite book: Coco Chanel*

*Favourite film and television programme: Mad Men*

*Favourite place of entertainment: Always changing*

**Wardrobe**

*Coats/jackets: 50*

*Blazers: 15*

*Elegant blazers: 10*

*Tops: 30*

*Blouses: 15*

*T-shirts: 50*

*Trousers: 40*

*Skirts: 15*

*Knitwears (poncho, cardi, pullover, skirt, dress): 20*

*Dresses: 25*

*Lingerie:70*

*Tights: 120*

*Shoes, boots, sandals: 100*

*Bags: 50*

*Purses: 5*

*Hats, scarves, gloves: 100*

*Belts:30*

*Umbrellas:12*

*Jewellery/watches: 250-300*

## **Future**

The SFB project has been pending for the last one and a half years. One reason is that I had other professional activities like writing my PhD thesis and getting through the final process of my PhD studies. However there was another reason: the lack of financial support. The actual site and the project itself is exhausted. The community would need new motivations, more fresh staff from volunteers and new engaging activities. The website would need a full rebirth both in its structure and in its design and it should be embedded in the new social media platforms more deeply.

My brand new plans go much further than a street fashion archive; I would like to build a large online archive of national fashion incorporating the new street fashion site as well. To explain these future plans I would need another presentation.

Street Fashion Budapest

[www.streetfashionbudapest.hu](http://www.streetfashionbudapest.hu)