



THE EVOLUTION OF FASHION AND ITS INTERPRETATION IN CONTEMPORARY DESIGN INSPIRED BY PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

Professional paper
DOI: 10.5937/CT_ITI26267R

**Sanja Risteski^{1*}, Marija Kertakova^{1,a}, Silvana Zhezhova^{1,b},
Saska Golomeova Longurova^{1,c}, Vangja Dimitrijeva-Kuzmanoska²**

¹Goce Delcev University, ¹Faculty of Technology, Stip, North Macedonia

²Art Academy, Goce Delcev University, Shtip, North Macedonia,

ORCID ID: 0009-0004-7903-4306

*E-mail: sanja.risteski@ugd.edu.mk, ORCID ID: 0009-0000-9390-0929

^aORCID ID: 0009-0002-3229-7366

^bORCID ID: 0009-0009-0285-5700

^cORCID ID: 0009-0002-2182-8520

ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the evolution of clothing throughout history, its application and function in different social and professional contexts, and its transformation into contemporary fashion design. The research examines changes in clothing, fashion trends, and the influences that have shaped fashion over time, including cultural, social, military, and health-related aspects. In addition to the theoretical analysis, the paper presents a practically realized contemporary fashion design inspired by historical and modern fashion influences.

Key words: fabric, clothing, history, trends, materials.

EVOLUCIJA MODE I NJENA INTERPRETACIJA U SAVREMENOM DIZAJNU INSPIRISANOM ZAŠTITNOM ODEĆOM

APSTRAKT: Ovaj rad analizira evoluciju odeće kroz istoriju, njenu primenu i funkciju u različitim društvenim i profesionalnim kontekstima, kao i njenu transformaciju u savremeni modni dizajn. Istraživanje razmatra promene u odevanju, modne trendove i uticaje koji su oblikovali modu kroz vreme, uključujući kulturne, društvene, vojne i zdravstvene aspekte. Pored teorijske analize, rad predstavlja i praktično realizovano savremeno modno rešenje inspirisano istorijskim i modernim modnim uticajima.

Ključne reči: tkanina, odeća, istorija, trendovi, materijali.

1. INTRODUCTION



Fashion can be briefly defined as the continuous transformation of clothing styles and appearances adopted by specific groups of people. From a sociological perspective, it functions as a system of signs, a reflection of social values, and a means of shaping both collective and individual identity.

As an essential part of culture, fashion is expressed not only through clothing, but also through jewelry, artistic objects and other forms of visual and material culture. It is not limited to external appearance, but also represents a form of behavior and social communication. In this sense, fashion refers to a style of dressing characteristic of particular groups within specific historical periods and it is not universally accepted by all members of society.

Fashion exists across all historical periods and is characterized by constant change, fluctuations and cycles of rise and decline. It is also closely linked to major historical events such as wars, revolutions and other social transformations. This highlights the importance of understanding its underlying drivers and the factors that influence its development and emergence.

From initial concept development and sketching, through pattern making, garment production, market analysis and product distribution up to its final consumption, fashion clearly operates as a complex industry.

Today, fashion represents a form of personal expression and self-presentation in the contemporary world. It is fast-paced, dynamic and constantly evolving. It remains one of the most influential phenomena in Western civilization from the Renaissance period to the present day [1, 2].

Fashion and textile development have always been closely connected to historical events and social transformations, particularly wars and periods of crisis. Military conflicts have significantly influenced clothing design introducing elements of functionality, durability and uniformity that later became integrated into everyday fashion through the concept of the military style. Similarly, historical shifts in society have often dictated changes in materials, comfort and the overall purpose of clothing.

The influence of textiles extends beyond fashion into other fields, especially medicine. Historically, the need for protection, hygiene and functionality led to the development of specialized medical textiles. Textiles have always held a fundamental role in human life, evolving from basic protective materials in the past to highly specialized and multifunctional applications today, reflecting their wide presence and continuous importance across both historical and contemporary context [3, 4, 5].

In both historical and contemporary contexts, textiles demonstrate a continuous evolution, reflecting technological progress and societal needs. This confirms that fashion and textile design are not isolated aesthetic practices, but dynamic systems deeply intertwined with history.

In the contemporary context, fashion continues to evolve rapidly and remains highly responsive to social, cultural and global changes. In the period following the pandemic, significant shifts in consumer behavior and design priorities have become evident, with a growing emphasis on comfort and practicality in clothing, as well as the ongoing trend of



sustainable and circular fashion, which is highly relevant today. At the same time, there is an increasing awareness of the need to slow down the fashion cycle and move away from fast fashion tendencies. Greater attention is now being given to design approaches that prioritize quality, durability and sustainability. This shift reflects a broader effort within the industry to promote more responsible production and consumption, where long-lasting materials and thoughtful design play a key role in shaping the future of fashion [6, 7].

1.1. Historical Development of Fashion and Clothing

From the earliest periods of human history, the human body and clothing have been closely interconnected, whether for functional, aesthetic or other reasons. Clothing can be defined as the protection of the entire body or specific body parts using various coverings made from natural or artificial materials. It is a characteristic feature of humankind and originates from the need to protect the body from harmful external, primarily climatic influences such as cold, rain, humidity and heat. Over time, clothing became a symbol of civilization and comfort, while the need to enhance appearance and emphasize its aesthetic function gradually emerged. This development contributed to frequent changes in styles and the evolution of fashion. It is well known that different historical periods were characterized by changing ideals of the human body, which contemporary fashion of each period attempted to follow, emphasize or even “correct.” In earlier times, fashion and dress codes were much stricter and less tolerant of deviation from established norms, whereas today’s fashion is significantly more liberal and diverse, supported by the development of various styles and subcultures that allow individuals greater freedom of choice. This has enabled people to express themselves more freely through the way they present their bodies. Throughout history, the development of costume follows two distinct lines, closely connected to two main categories of clothing: women’s and men’s fashion. From a contemporary perspective, the most relevant developmental line can be understood through the differentiation between masculine and feminine clothing, particularly reflected in the two basic garment types: trousers and skirts.

Research in the field of costume history clearly indicates that, in the past, men occupied a dominant position in terms of variety and ornamentation in clothing. In many historical periods, men’s garments were often more richly decorated than those worn by women.

Furthermore, the study of costume history highlights the need to challenge traditional prejudices related to the strict division between male and female clothing. When considering broader classifications, some costume historians propose an alternative division of clothing into “tight-fitted” and “loose or draped” forms. Within such a framework, contemporary clothing can largely be placed within the category of fitted garments. There are also various theories regarding the fundamental motives for wearing clothing, which are generally classified into several different groups. Before the mid-19th century, most clothing was custom-made. With the invention of the sewing machine and the rise of industrial production in the 20th century, clothing began to be mass-produced in standardized sizes, expanding retail availability.

Today, the fashion industry operates globally, with design, production, and sales often taking place in different countries. In the 21st century, fashion has become highly seasonal



and fast-changing, strongly influenced by media and social networks, which make trends immediately accessible.

Increased living standards, mobility and the demand for appearance have further driven the growth of ready-made clothing, making fashion a highly profitable global industry supported by modern technology and automated production processes. [8, 9, 10].

1.2. Clothing as a protective system, functional and aesthetic use

Clothing has historically functioned as a protective system, developed primarily to shield the human body from environmental conditions such as cold, heat, rain and humidity. In its earliest forms, clothing was made from natural materials and served a strictly functional purpose, ensuring human survival and adaptation to different climates and living conditions.

Over time, the protective role of clothing evolved alongside social and technological development. Different historical periods introduced new materials, construction techniques and design approaches that improved both the durability and functionality of garments. Clothing gradually became not only a means of physical protection but also a reflection of social status, cultural identity and technological progress.

The functional use of clothing expanded further with industrialization, when mass production and standardized sizing made protective garments more accessible. In modern times, the concept of protective clothing extends beyond everyday wear and includes specialized applications designed for specific working environments and conditions, emphasizing safety, performance and comfort.

This evolution demonstrates that clothing is not only an aesthetic or cultural element, but fundamentally a functional system that continues to adapt to human needs throughout history. The human instinct for survival led to the early development of protective clothing, initially in very primitive forms. Protective clothing, understood as a type of “covering” garment, was used to shield the body from physical harm.

In prehistoric times, humans protected themselves by attaching bundles of grass to their clothing in order to conceal and defend themselves from aggressive animals.

The earliest evidence of protective clothing suggests that the first garments were made from animal skins, with some of the oldest findings discovered in Europe and Western Asia. Until the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, clothing was mainly used as protection against weather conditions.

With the development of civilization, protective equipment evolved from simple wooden shields to more advanced metal forms of protection. During the Middle Ages, metal armor became the primary means of protection for knights. In the medieval and Renaissance periods, armor was regarded as the most effective form of defense against contemporary weapons and was also considered an elaborate form of body decoration.

From the 14th to the 16th century, protective clothing reached a high level of effectiveness, as it was shown to adequately meet the defensive needs of that time based on contemporary analyses. However, the emergence of firearms significantly reduced the effectiveness of traditional armor. To maintain sufficient protection, armor became increasingly heavy,



9. Međunarodna naučna konferencija
„Savremeni trendovi i inovacije u tekstilnoj industriji“
17-18. septembar 2026. Beograd, Srbija

reaching weights of up to approximately 50 kg, which greatly limited mobility and placed a considerable burden on the wearer.

Leather garments were originally used as underlayers beneath armor, but over time multiple layers of leather began to be used directly as protective clothing, offering improved flexibility and ease of movement. This period also marked the beginning of discussions on the balance between protection and comfort, particularly mobility.

The period from the 17th to the 19th century, characterized by the Industrial Revolution, introduced significant transformations in the design, materials and overall function of protective clothing.

With the Industrial Revolution, there was a significant increase in the use of protective clothing against industrial hazards such as heat, fire, explosions and chemical substances. The beginning of the 21st century marks a period of innovation in textile science and new materials, leading to the transformation of traditional clothing functions into advanced technologies and modern textile production systems [11].

From the mid-20th century onwards, textiles increasingly began to be used not only for aesthetic and clothing purposes but also for functional applications. This shift marked the beginning of a new phase in textile development, where performance and protection became equally important as design.

Functional textiles represent an important segment of contemporary textile science and industry, focusing on materials designed not only for aesthetic purposes but primarily for specific performance and protective functions. Functional textiles are developed to meet diverse requirements such as protection, durability and adaptability to different environmental and working conditions.

Technical and high-performance textiles are widely used in sectors such as healthcare, military protection, sportswear and industrial applications. These materials are engineered to provide enhanced properties, including resistance to heat, chemicals, mechanical stress and biological factors. In addition, modern developments in textile engineering have led to the creation of smart textiles that incorporate advanced technologies for improved functionality. Special-purpose clothing design emphasizes the integration of material properties with ergonomic and functional requirements, ensuring both protection and usability. Research in this field highlights the importance of selecting appropriate fabrics and construction techniques to achieve optimal performance in demanding conditions. The development of functional and protective textiles has also significantly influenced the healthcare sector. Alongside industrial and military applications, textiles increasingly began to be used for medical and hygienic purposes, contributing to improved protection, safety and comfort in healthcare environments. The advancement of textile technologies enabled the production of materials with specialized properties suitable for medical garments, protective equipment and other healthcare-related applications.

In contemporary textile science, medical textiles represent an important field focused on combining functionality, protection, hygiene and user comfort. Their application became particularly significant during periods of global health crises, when the importance of protective and functional clothing was further emphasized. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of medical and protective textiles became especially evident, as



protective clothing and face masks became essential elements of everyday life. This period further accelerated the development of innovative textile materials focused on safety, functionality and sustainability [7, 12].

1.3. Transformation of protective clothing into contemporary everyday fashion

Throughout fashion history, protective and functional clothing has continuously influenced contemporary fashion design. Garments originally created for military and protective purposes gradually evolved beyond their primary function and became a significant source of inspiration in modern fashion. Elements such as durability, patterns, oversized silhouettes and details have been reinterpreted within contemporary clothing design and adapted for everyday use.

Today, military clothing has had a strong influence on fashion trends due to its recognizable forms and symbolic association with strength, discipline and trends. Over time, these characteristics were transformed into aesthetic features widely present in contemporary fashion collections. Fashion designers increasingly combine functionality with aesthetics, creating garments that respond not only to practical needs but also to contemporary lifestyles and personal expression. This transformation demonstrates how protective clothing can evolve from a purely functional system into a source of inspiration for innovative and modern fashion design.

Rei Kawakubo is one of the fashion designers who is known for redefining beauty and challenging fashion conventions, she has become one of the most influential figures in contemporary design since the 1970s. Punk and military influences are recurring themes in the work of Rei Kawakubo, particularly evident in her Fall 1994 “Metamorphosis” collection. In this collection, military inspiration is strongly expressed through shrunken, boiled wool jackets combined with voluminous skirts, creating a distinctive contrast in silhouette and proportion. Rei Kawakubo frequently incorporates military and punk influences into her designs, reinterpreting uniform elements through deconstructed silhouettes and conceptual garment structures. Her work for Comme des Garçons often explores the relationship between clothing and the body, transforming protective and military-inspired forms into contemporary fashion expressions [13]. A recent example of the reinterpretation of military aesthetics in contemporary fashion is the Rei Kawakubo Autumn/Winter 2025 collection for Comme des Garçons Homme Plus, presented in Paris under the theme “To Hell With War”. In this collection, Kawakubo deconstructs military iconography, challenging its symbolic meaning and reinterpreting its role in contemporary fashion. The collection breaks down traditional military elements such as uniforms, camouflage patterns, and structured forms, transforming them into abstract and conceptual design expressions. Military helmets are reimagined as sculptural avant-garde headpieces, emphasizing the tension between functionality and artistic interpretation.

Through this approach, Kawakubo continues her exploration of military symbolism, transforming functional and authoritative references into critical fashion statements that question war, identity and uniformity in contemporary society [14, 15].



Figure 1. Rei Kawakubo, *Comme des Garçons Homme Plus AW25 Collection*. Source: Jeanson (2025), CRASH Magazine
<https://www.crash.fr/rei-kawakubo-declares-to-hell-with-war-in-provocative-aw25-collection/>

2. EXPERIMENTAL

2.1. Design inspired by Rei Kawakubo

2.1.1. Conceptual connection

The presented sketch (Fig. 2) interprets the theoretical principles of Rei Kawakubo into an experimental menswear design solution. The inspiration is reflected through the reinterpretation of protective clothing elements and their transformation into a contemporary silhouette that combines functionality with conceptual expression.

The design process focused on adapting protective garment characteristics through deconstructed layering and kimono-inspired construction. Structural balance is achieved through the interaction between controlled form and relaxed volume, creating visual tension between protection and vulnerability.



Figure 2: New model inspired by Rei Kawakubo military-inspired design

The olive-green palette was selected to reference military and protective garments, while the asymmetrical red accent introduces contrast and symbolic disruption. The wide belt element emphasizes restraint and stability, reinforcing the relationship between body control and structural protection.



Figure 3: Color palette used for the new model

Through this approach, the model applies Kawakubo's design methodology by transforming recognizable protective references into an abstract contemporary menswear form, where traditional construction principles are reconstructed to communicate resistance, transformation and critical reinterpretation. The technical sketch of the new model is presented in Fig. 4.

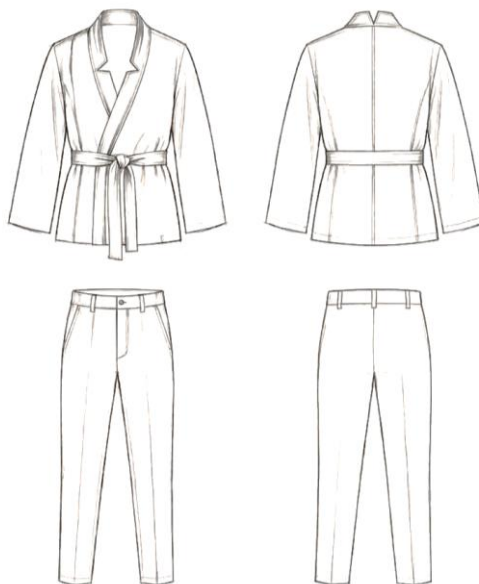


Figure 4: Technical sketch of the newly designed model

Following Rei Kawakubo's critical visual language, this design transforms military aesthetics from a symbol of power into a narrative protection. The kimono pattern serves as a cultural foundation, reimagined through military deconstruction to create a dialogue between tradition, conflict and resistance.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 New redesigned model of men's clothes, inspired by protective clothes

This experimental menswear design explores the reinterpretation of protective clothing through a contemporary fashion language. The model is developed through the transformation of functional garment elements into an expressive silhouette that balances structure and character.

The upper part of the design is based on a kimono-inspired wrap construction, chosen for its architectural simplicity and adaptability. This traditional form is restructured with protective clothing references, creating a layered visual effect that suggests security,



restraint and comfort. The wide black belt emphasizes the waistline while symbolizing control and structural stability.

The olive-green color palette directly references military and protective uniforms, reinforcing associations with discipline. In contrast, the asymmetrical red textile element introduces visual disruption and symbolic tension, representing vulnerability, resistance and the traces of conflict.

The trousers maintain a narrowed functional silhouette, allowing movement while preserving the utilitarian character of the composition. Additional details such as fingerless gloves and heavy footwear further strengthen the protective aesthetic and support the concept of reconstructed defense garments adapted for contemporary menswear. The model was created using textile waste generated as cutting leftovers from a garment manufacturing company, with the aim of promoting sustainable approaches in contemporary fashion design. The selected materials, originally considered production waste, were reinterpreted and incorporated into a new fashion concept, demonstrating the potential for their aesthetic and functional reuse. During the design and production process, special attention was given to the efficient utilization of textile materials, pattern arrangement in order to minimize additional waste and achieve a more sustainable production approach. This process emphasizes the importance of circular design principles and responsible material consumption within the contemporary fashion industry.

The experimental process focused on deconstructing conventional protective clothing forms and reconstructing them through kimono-inspired pattern cutting, resulting in a hybrid design that challenges the boundaries between military clothes and modern fashion expression.

In a broader historical context, this design also reflects the original role of clothing as protection. Throughout history, garments were not primarily defined by aesthetics, but by their functional necessity - serving as a barrier against environmental conditions, offering protection. In this sense, protective clothing represents one of the earliest foundations of dress culture.

Today, these utilitarian origins are revisited and reinterpreted within contemporary fashion practices. Rather than serving purely functional needs, protective garments are transformed into conceptual and aesthetic resources. In this design, that transformation becomes central: historical notions of protection are translated into a modern visual language where functionality and fashion expression coexist within a single experimental menswear silhouette [16, 17].

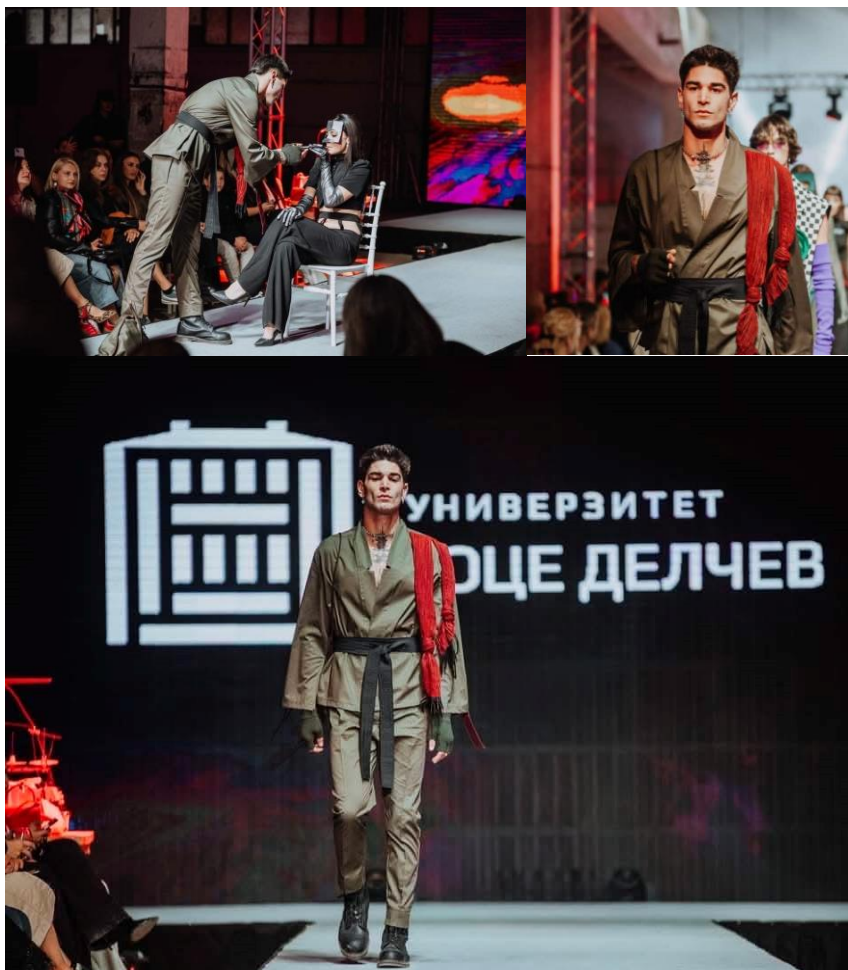


Figure 5. The final appearance of the model (front and rear)¹

4. CONCLUSION

Fashion represents a dynamic phenomenon that continuously evolves in response to historical, social, technological and cultural changes. Throughout history, clothing has fulfilled not only aesthetic functions but also protective, functional and symbolic roles, reflecting the needs and values of different societies and historical periods. The

¹Source: Shtip Fashion Days 2025 <https://www.instagram.com/shtipfashiondays/p/DAIHQPwIlmS/>
 Model designed by student Emil Vezenkov. Part of the collection “Eclectic” 2025. Mentor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sanja Risteski.



development of textiles and clothing has been closely connected to wars, industrialization, technological progress and contemporary global challenges, all of which have significantly influenced the transformation of fashion design.

The research presented in this paper confirms that protective clothing has had an important impact on the development of contemporary fashion. Elements originally created for military have gradually been transformed into aesthetic and conceptual components within modern fashion design. Contemporary designers increasingly reinterpret functional garments through new design approaches, creating a balance between protection, functionality and visual expression.

The practical realization of the contemporary menswear model presented in this paper demonstrates how protective clothing can serve as inspiration for innovative fashion design. Through the use of textile waste generated as cutting leftovers from garment production, the model also emphasizes the importance of sustainability, circular design principles and responsible material utilization in the contemporary fashion industry.

This research highlights that fashion is not only a reflection of aesthetic trends, but also a complex system shaped by history, technology, functionality and human needs. The reinterpretation of protective clothing within contemporary design confirms the continuous connection between past and present, as well as tradition and innovation in modern fashion practice.

REFERENCES

- [1] Faiers, J. (2008). *Tartan (Series: Textiles That Changed the World)*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts.
- [2] Димитријева, К. В., Ристески, С. (2017). Креирање на облека, УГД, Штип.
- [3] Risteski, S., Srebrenkoska, V., & Zhezhova, S. (2017). Applying of different fabrics for design of the protective military clothes. *Quality of Life*, 8(1-2), 56-63.
- [4] Risteski, S., & Srebrenkoska, V. (2020). Appearance of protective clothing over the centuries. *Tekstilna industrija*, 68(4), 38-48.
- [5] Zhezhova, S., Risteski, S., Jordeva, S., & Srebrenkoska, V. (2022). Medical textiles, possibilities and challenges. *Zbornik radova Naučna konferencija SANUS 2022*.
- [6] Kertakova M., Risteski S., Dimitrijeva V., Efremov J. (2019). Fashion as a social phenomenon socio-psychological mechanisms of impact, in 2 th International scientific conference *Contemporary trends and innovation in the textile industry*, 16-17 May, Belgrade, Proceedings, p. 70-78.
- [7] Risteski, S., & Srebrenkoska, V. (2021). Fashion in a time of pandemic. *Tekstilna industrija*, 69(3), 18-28. <https://doi.org/10.5937/tekstind2103018R>
- [8] Ристески С. (2025). Дизајн и креирање на женска облека, p. 10. ISBN 978-608-277-129-8.
- [9] Grau, F., & Marie. (2013). *Povijest odijevanja*. Zagreb: Naklada Jesenski i Turk.



9. Međunarodna naučna konferencija
„Savremeni trendovi i inovacije u tekstilnoj industriji“
17-18. septembar 2026. Beograd, Srbija

-
- [10] Kertakova, M., Jordeva, S., & Mojsov, K. (2019). Fashion during the 20th century post-war periods. *Tekstilna industrija*, 67(3), 29-38. <https://doi.org/10.5937/tekstind1903029K>
- [11] Risteski, S. (2018). *Design and performance of clothes for special purpose*. Goce Delčev University, Štip.
- [12] Horrocks, A. R., & Anand, S. C. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of Technical Textiles*. Woodhead Publishing.
- [13] Kadolph, S. J. (2010). *Textiles*. Pearson Education.
- [14] Borrelli-Persson, L. (2017, April 11). Comme des Garçons Fall 1994 Ready-to-Wear Collection. *Vogue*. <https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/fall-1994-ready-to-wear/comme-des-garcons>.
- [15] Jeanson, I. (2025, January 25). Rei Kawakubo declares 'To Hell With War' in provocative AW25 collection. *CRASH Magazine*. <https://www.crash.fr/rei-kawakubo-declares-to-hell-with-war-in-provocative-aw25-collection/>
- [16] Risteski, S., & Srebrenkoska, V. (2020). Textile waste from confection industries and possibilities for its recycling. *Tekstilna industrija*, 68(4), 77-82.
- [17] Risteski, S., & Srebrenkoska, V. (2021). Impact of the type of cutting layout on the consumption of textile material. In IV International conference *Contemporary trends and innovations in the textile industry*, 16-17 th September, Belgrade, Proceedings, 156-164.