

Why Italian fashion has “set up house” in Switzerland

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It is a silent move, that has been gone on for years. The first internationally important, Italian textile companies set up their offices about ten years ago, and others set up their Swiss offices after the opening of the borders. However, after the news that The North Face were moving their Italian headquarters from Treviso to Ticino, the desire to discover what it is happening across the border has definitely increased.

So, we asked **Franco Cavadini**, who, for thirty years, has been the chairman of AFRA, the Ticino Clothing Manufacturers' Association, for more information; first of all, we asked him to confirm that a lot of international textile companies have their head offices in the canton. “Yes, there are several. **Ermenegildo Zegna** have been in Ticino for almost thirty years; they celebrated their anniversary last year. They have large production and management facilities in Stabio. Also the German company **Hugo Boss** has been in Ticino for several years, but theirs is primarily an important logistic office which has just extended to Coldrerio. Also for **Gucci**, the function of the offices is primarily logistic; they can be found in Bioggio. And then, there are **Armani**, and others.”

But is Ticino a textile canton? “There is also a textile industry in Ticino; there are several important workshops that produce for either international brands, or their own brands. This was a sector that once employed as many as 10,000 people in manufacturing. Now, there are no more than 2500 workers; here, too, we have felt the effects of relocation.”

The number of employees working in companies in the textile sector, including those involved in logistics and production, **is now 4000**, and there are various reasons why many of them are working in Switzerland and not in Italy. “For example, they have found services and training here. But you must remember that it's easy to find Italian staff, with people coming across the border from Varese, Como and Sondrio; the Italian culture and language can also be used, which makes the exchange between Italy and Switzerland easier.”

Fashion grows with Italy, “however, the proximity also of language and culture, combined with the excellent services for companies, tax relief and greater working flexibility make this place very attractive,” Cavadini says. “With the bilateral agreements, everything has become easier; moving people and goods from Italy to Switzerland, and vice versa, is no longer as complicated as it once was. We aren't a member of the European Community but, apart from the recent events linked to the tax shield, there aren't any great difficulties.”

Is it for tax and bureaucratic reasons, then, that the big brands move to Ticino? “Not only; maybe the environment here in Ticino is ideal for setting up a company, but not only from an employment and tax point of view; for example, relations between companies in this sector are open, there is cooperation and transparency of competence. This is an environment that you can't find elsewhere. The so-called Fashion Valley in Ticino has grown with the arrival of companies that are not

withdrawn; here, you will find a genuine district, not companies side by side, all just competing with each other.”

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