

***Title: Outdoor Clothing Design: Loss of Design Knowledge***

***Alternative Title: Design and Forget: Understanding ongoing Loss of Design Knowledge in UK Outdoor Clothing Sector***

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Design Research in Models of Design Process in UK Outdoor Trade

**Abstract:**

Comparative study of quality of standards and performance, quoted quality of design features in clothing intended for harsh and extreme outdoor weather condition that are colder, wetter than that best suited to human existence, suggest that ongoing loss of design-related knowledge within the outdoor clothing design sector in the UK. This paper reviews contemporary design processes used in the UK Outdoor Clothing Trade to identify in practical terms, the processes result in loss of knowledge and in the longer term little improvement in the quality of outdoor clothing in spite of expensive yearly expenditure across the sector in design activity.

The project involved interviews with nine senior design managers from major companies across the outdoor clothing sector in the NW of England. Key characteristics of their design processes were mapped morphologically.

These processes were inspected in terms of how design learning and design knowledge became crystallised and atrophies at individual, organisation and sector levels. The findings are that existing design processes typical of the UK outdoor clothing trade each year fail to build adequately on lessons learned from previous design experience. The implication is that there is little improvement in practical use terms in product outcomes. Many products advertised as significant breakthroughs are little better than products from decades before. The findings are supported by comparison between equipment designed and developed 80 years ago, and, anecdotally, by experienced users, testers retailers and designers in this sector that many contemporary outdoor clothing products were surpassed by many earlier products using less sophisticated materials and manufacturing techniques – to the extent that many experienced users continue to use more successful earlier products.

The paper concludes by pointing to specific areas in which design processes and by implication, quality of designed outcomes, can be improved.