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**CASE 7****Street fashion and identity:****On growing up in public**

More recently, the Young Designers foundation's practice has evolved from a project-based approach to creating environments for innovation. Projects such as the ones described above are a powerful inspiration and stimulus, but they need a structural follow-up when it comes to really shifting people's minds and working practices. They require a real context for transformation. One party that quickly embraced this new way of working was a social housing association in Amsterdam that owns large sections of the western part of the city, mainly middle-sized apartment buildings from the 1960s and 1970s. The population has changed from the original Dutch inhabitants to a diverse multicultural mix of families. There are reasons to worry about the future prospects for the large youth population, for many of these young people are comparatively undereducated and not well prepared to climb the first rungs on the social ladder. The street culture in the area is quite negative and at times destructive (literally, but also metaphorically), with small outbursts of unspoken frustration. Teenagers seeking to form their own identity within such an environment could easily slip into a downward spiral. This much we know—but what can we do? In collaboration with a local vocational training college, the Young Designers foundation set up a fashion studio in which forty teenagers spent a semester (after school hours) creating their own clothing collections, with the support of ten fashion designers. Some of the mothers happened to be excellent seamstresses, and were hired to form a production studio to make the garments. The kids were put firmly in control; the fashion designers were there only to support them through the process. This was quite an intense adventure for everyone, a positive and empowering experience in a neighborhood where those are not easy to find. All the hard work was rewarded with an inspired collection (under the name We Are Here) which eventually was proudly presented at a big fashion show before hundreds of guests (figure 2.3). More importantly, many of the youths had achieved a creative confidence and developed a real sense of responsibility through the project. All kinds of talents emerged—some were born project leaders. This fashion studio concept has been run several times now, and it has been successfully transported to other cities. Initiatives like this have the potential to turn a neighborhood around, by helping a new