

Social and Environmental Report for the tanning industry – SER 2020 – National Workshop Hungary

On December 3, 2019, the Hungarian workshop of the SER 2020 project on the sustainability of the European tanning and leather industry was held. The event took place at the Corvin Hotel Budapest within the frameworks of the forum "Sustainability in the Textile, Leather and Shoes Industry". The event, which was presented by the Light Industry Sectoral Social Dialogue (KÁPB) and was attended by the workers 'and employers' sides, highlighted several important issues of social dialogue.



There was a great deal of interest in the English-Hungarian forum: over 80 participants, manufacturers, traders, designers, teachers, domestic and foreign project partners and the professional press followed the lectures in a crowded conference room. The Forum focused on topics related to the leather industry, such as traceability in the supply chain, vocational education and training, innovation in the leather industry and restoring the image of the sector.

Introductory presentation on leather and shoe industry topics delivered by Ernő Molnár, associate professor at the University of Debrecen, titled „The Valuation of Industrial Concentrations in the Periphery? The changing geography of the Hungarian textile, clothing, leather and footwear industry” The lecture revealed that although the role of these sectors in the domestic manufacturing industry has continued to decline in the recent years, their importance is still significant in certain regions. In the tanning and leather industry, the automotive industry is primarily the biggest employer, while regarding the rest of the sector, small and medium-sized enterprises and micro-enterprises are the major players. The sector's workforce should be interpreted broadly, as many trading, planning, testing, etc. organizations exist and work within the Hungarian light industry. These companies also belong to this field, although these businesses are not included in the statistical data of the sector.

Dr. Ines Anderie, an expert at Pirmasens Institute for Research and Testing (PFI), presented in her lecture titled "Confidence and transparency in the leather industry" the LEATHER STANDARD by OEKO-TEX®. This certification is an excellent tool for manufacturers of leather upholstery, furniture, car seats and other leather goods for addressing concerns about chemicals used by the leather industry. Such certified products offer a high degree of safety to customers because they have been tested for harmful substances by independent testing institutes. The research institute is also in the field of professional training in the shoe industry, as it has a center of excellence representing the latest technology, which offers not only German but also foreigners who are interested in studying in the shoe industry.



The Portuguese footwear industry has seen tremendous progress over the last decade, which has made Portugal one of the world's leading shoe exporters. The Portuguese shoe industry cluster, professional organizations, technology and design centers supporting technological and design innovation play a major role in the development. This is how Rita Souto, Director of Education, CTCPC, Portuguese Technology Center, began her presentation. In her presentation on 'Innovations in the Portuguese Footwear Industry', she also outlined

the main points of the Portuguese footwear strategy and presented several interesting projects, such as: the Vocational Training Project (<https://www.ctcp.pt/shoefablab/>), or custom-designed shoes as personalized innovation (UNDANDY - DESIGN YOUR OWN SHOES, www.undandy.com, DIVERGE - MAKE YOUR OWN TRACK www.diverge-sneakers.com). She also provided the audience with a vivid example of the success of two different areas, jewellery and shoe industry, as evidenced by the beautiful footwear collection at <https://www.haggua.pt/en>.

Szabolcs Beóthy-Fehér, counselor of the Trade Union of Mine, Energy and Industry Workers, in her presentation titled "Improving Vocational Education and Health&Safety at Work – the OiRA Tool" also touched upon the situation of the Hungarian light industry. He explained the serious problems affecting the leather industry, such as: labor shortages, an aging workforce, low prestige, low wages - in spite of wage developments -, low domestic mobility, etc. He pointed out the technological challenges which the industry is facing and the fact that employers can make good use of the GINOP risk assessment system to protect occupational health and safety in the training of health and safety representatives. The occupational safety training curriculum for the Hungarian light industry (available at www.safeinwork.hu) fills a gap; the online risk assessment tool for businesses is a good complement to the materials made especially for the tanning and leather industry, but only available in foreign languages (OiRA).

Mr Gonzalez-Quijano, secretary general of COTANCE, drew the attention of the audience to the report on the social and environmental analysis of the European leather industry and the favourable ecological footprint of the leather industry. In his presentation on the ecological footprint of the leather industry, he said an interesting fact. As the leather industry fully processes the by-product of the food industry, ie. the meat industry, it cannot be held responsible for the increased CO₂ emissions. It would cause great trouble not to produce valuable products from the skin of slaughtered animals, because organic and hazardous waste would be a huge problem. He also presented the objectives of the second European Leather Industry Report (SER 2020). The report is designed to showcase the results of the European industry in terms of sustainability.



Ferenc Schmél, an expert at TechnOrg, took the floor. In his presentation titled "Protecting the term „Leather”", he addressed the authenticity of leather products. It is estimated that 15-20% of all leather products on the market (without counting footwear) have labels that are misleading because the synthetic materials used are misleadingly referred to as "leather" (eg "vegan leather", "textile leather", "eco leather"). . This results in a loss of around € 1.7 billion

a year for the European tanning and leather industry, which can account for up to 20% of its turnover. The audience learned that COTANCE has initiated an European level legal regime to protect the leather industry and prevent the consumers' misguidance. The speaker explained that this effort is continuously supported by the Association of Hungarian Light Industry and set up a working group to review domestic practices. Dr. Schmél Ferenc, chairman of the working group, argued convincingly that the word "leather" in itself, ie without any indication (eg "natural", "real", etc.), would mean material derived from animal hides and other (mainly synthetic) leather substitutes should not include the word "leather" or a syllable.



An important topic at the event was the vocational training and education of the leather industry, a new form of which was introduced very vividly by Erika Pollák. The „School of Leather” (Bórtanoda), run by him, is a private school open to anyone of all ages and backgrounds. The instructors will show you the steps involved in making leather products during the practical classes, and the well-equipped workshop, with the help of mentors and working together, will provide a good atmosphere and bring the real joy of creation.

The event, organized by the Association of Hungarian Light Industry, was supported by the SER 2020 project. We are delighted to say that the project has succeeded in reaching several domestic manufacturers and inviting them to the event. This high-profile international event has finally moved the entire sector, as evidenced by the fact that dozens of leather and shoe companies have registered for the event.

Budapest, 08.12.2019