



Fresh new footwear looks on show at German trade fair GDS.

CREDIT: RENE TILLMANN IMESSE DÜSSELDORF

CEC-Made-Shoe project looks to add value and sustainability in Europe

Concerned with a manufacturing decline across many European sectors, a project commissioned by Confédération Européenne de l'Industrie de la Chaussure (CEC), the official representative body of the European footwear industry, was established four years ago to look at constructive ways of preventing a slump in the European footwear sector. The CEC-Made-Shoe project focused on ways of adding value at each phase of footwear production throughout Europe. Some interesting conclusions were drawn.

The CEC-Made-Shoe project has just come to an end after four years. This initiative from Europe's official footwear industry body, Brussels-based CEC, was concerned with turning the European shoe sector from an industry-driven, resource-based activity into a market-led, knowledge-based activity without sacrificing style and fashion. A number of partners from key manufacturing regions were involved including Spain,

Portugal, Italy, Switzerland and Belgium, who have been working on the project for the last four years.

Examples of new concepts it has looked into include a 'one step production process' (production of a shoe in just one assembly or injection operation), the 'seamless shoe' (elimination of stitching operations which represent approximately 60% of the whole labour content), the 'no last shoe' and the 'reusable last concept' (one last for several sizes). In terms of environment, the project looked into the 'eatable shoe' and the 'end-of-life shoe' in order to promote sustainability and in response to growing demand for eco-friendly products from consumers.

The Spanish footwear manufacturers' association (FICE) hosted a half-day conference in Elche on June 17 to announce the preliminary results of CEC-Made-Shoe, even though the 50 partner organisations from 14 participating countries are still working out the details of how best to take these initial findings forward.

Early presentation

For CEC, as suggested above, a number of clear, headline results have emerged from the project. The first is that the organisation believes it is time for footwear manufacturers in Europe to start looking at new “product concepts”, new types of shoe, with activewear and shoes specifically made for consumers who want to wear as well as eat organic two of the examples it suggests immediately.

Another area in which the organisation believes European producers must press home an existing advantage is in using up-to-date design tools, technology that allows them to present styles and ideas to interested parties before a new shoe design exists in physical form.

Also emerging from the wider project will be initiatives to improve the distribution of finished footwear collections from factories to points of sale. Linked to this will be moves to capture, manage and share data across the industry.

Lastly, CEC-Made-Shoe will generate new approaches to training future generations of footwear professionals in Europe, with possibility of a master’s degree in European footwear one of the concrete suggestions to have emerged so far.

Overall, the main objective of the project is to create a ‘knowledge producing and transforming community’ (KPTC) across the industry, which will fulfil various functions. It will recognise strategic changes in human, societal and economic needs and technological potential. It will also be concerned with making plans and providing resources for the development of products, processes, materials and organisations and ultimately turning this knowledge into footwear products. The KPTC should lead to an increase in investment in research and help move the sector from mass production to higher added value and sustainable products, processes, materials and organisations.

Comfort, environment, custom-made

The three key elements of the shift from a product-centred shoe sector to a human-centred approach have been defined by project participants as comfort, environment and custom-made, conveniently lining up with CEC’s initials. In terms of comfort, the idea is to focus on the physical form of the foot during all types of activity, including walking, running and standing, while the environmental aspect has so far looked into developing 100% ‘nature-friendly’ materials and sustainable production processes. The custom-made element has focused on style and fashion, as well as on fit.

The CEC-Made-Shoe project has aimed to take consumers’ whole lifecycle into account, from childhood through to old age. It has also aimed to take into account sex, race and regional requirements, with a regional world market in mind, rather than simply focusing on the European market.



Milan-based Lorenzo Banfi creates a stir on the catwalk at GDS. CREDIT: RENE TILLMANN / IMESSE DÜSSELDORF

Radical innovations explored

“The breakthrough strategy of CEC-Made-Shoe project is the development of radical innovations, which can constitute in the next years, instruments for increasing the competitiveness of the European footwear sector in order to reach a forecasted 10% of world production by year 2010 (which means a growth of roughly 300 million of pairs a year with respect to 2003 and of EUR 6.9 billion in value) and to remain the leader in fashion, design, quality, creativity, trend-setting and in specialised niche markets,” a CEC statement concludes.

“CEC-made-shoe has the ambition (radical change in processes, materials and integration) far beyond the actual state of art, which should offer the industry a knowledge framework to increase its competitiveness and transform this labour-intensive industry into a knowledge community,” says the statement.

It continues: “This is possible since, for the first time in history, a knowledge producing and transforming community, composed of partners of different disciplines (materials, chemical, logistics, waste treatment, ITC, machine, process planners, market visionary, stylists, pattern makers, traders and retailers) and from other sectors (chemicals, synthetic, network suppliers) share their research effort based on one comprehensive and radical new view, which should result in a new business model and new applicable knowledge for the sector in Europe. Radically new is a direct link between the basic supply industry and the footwear manufacturer and consumer to ensure sustainable development.”