



New spirit of unity

Italy's national tanning industry association, UNIC, appears to have started out on a new footing under president Gianni Russo. A new air of unity, of positivity and of commitment to the development of the industry, domestically and internationally, was in evidence at the 2016 UNIC Assembly.

Italian tanning industry association UNIC held its annual assembly in Milan at the start of the summer. The event, the first under the presidency of Gianni Russo, made it clear that the organisation is operating with a renewed spirit of co-operation and unity. Many participants on the day highlighted this spirit of "teamwork" and complimented Mr Russo and new UNIC director general, Fulvia Bacchi, for putting this in place. Mr Russo commented that, although he had been elected president in June 2015, he had waited until March 2016 to take up the leadership role in full, but he earned a rousing round of applause at the assembly when he said he felt sure UNIC had achieved in the four months leading up to the event what it might previously have taken four years to do.

Southern vision

Gianni Russo represents neither of Italy's two biggest tanning clusters, those around Santa Croce in Tuscany and Arzignano in Veneto. He is president of his family's specialist lamb nappa and calf tannery in Casandrino, near Naples. He told assembly delegates that although he had been elected UNIC president last year, he had waited until this March to take up the role fully. But it was clear to the audience that he had been working hard in the background to build unity.

He said: "The Italian tanning industry of today owes a lot to its clusters in Tuscany, Veneto and Campania. They are similar, but they are not the same and that's been a great benefit to us because it has helped us work with a collective mentality, which we have been doing for a long time, alongside Italy's footwear and leathers goods manufacturers. Other sectors are just bringing this in now, or trying to."

Exhibitions are for visitors

Mr Russo then went on to pay tribute to the centres of technology and innovation that run in each of these big clusters, and also to the Lineapelle exhibition. For years, of course, Bologna was the venue for Lineapelle. This ended in 2014, when the event moved to Milan, not without



UNIC president, Gianni Russo (centre), speaking at the organisation's 2016 assembly in Milan.

CREDIT: UNIC

controversy. Mr Russo said an end is now in sight to the legal wrangles that persisted after Lineapelle moved and that the exhibition is, in his opinion, "the strongest in the leather industry".

He quoted Italy's minister for economic development, Carlo Calenda, who said recently that when exhibitions take place, they have to be of benefit to visitors, not to organisers. "UNIC has always held that view," Gianni Russo said, "and holds it now more than ever."

He went on to explain that the dates for the autumn edition this year have been pushed back to September 20-22 (compared to September 9-11 last year and September 10-12 in 2014) precisely because the later dates work better for visitors. Exhibition site Fiera Milano had a gap in its calendar and UNIC decided to move Lineapelle into it.

Market ups and downs

Footwear was the biggest market segment for Italian leather last year, consuming 51.6 million square-metres, which was 41.7% of the total, according to UNIC's figures. However, footwear's consumption of finished leather from Italian tanneries fell by 5.7% between 2014 and 2015. In fact the figure has been falling steadily since 2011. Between 2011 and 2015, the volume of Italian leather supplied to footwear manufacturers declined by 14%.

Last year, leathers goods consumed 31.3 million square-metres of Italian leather, making it the second biggest market for UNIC members with just over 25% of the

total volume produced. However, here too there was a fall, of 1.3% compared to 2014. The figure for 2015 was the same as that for 2013. And to use the same comparison between 2011 and 2015, leathers goods manufacturers have increased their use of Italian leather by 13.4%.

Furniture was the next biggest market, using 19.2 million square-metres of Italian leather, 15.5% of the 2015 total and 1.7% less than the year before. Between 2011 and 2015, furniture manufacturers have lowered their consumption of Italian leather by 23.2%.

Automotive is a growth market for Italian tanners, however. In 2015, 12.6 million square-metres of Italian leather went to automotive customers, 10.2% of the total. Year on year, this represented an increase of 5.2%, and compared to the figure for 2011, UNIC members have increased the amount of leather they supply to automotive customers by 27.3%.

International co-operation

The UNIC president also said his organisation's relationship with the representative body of the leather industry in Brussels, COTANCE, is better now than it has been for a number of years. "It's almost as though UNIC or Italy had effected its own Brexit," he joked, "but now things are better." In response to this, the secretary general of COTANCE, Gustavo González Quijano, said his organisation now has "a new and renewed vision" and needs Italy and Italy's enthusiasm to turn the vision into reality. ☺