



Museu de la Pell leather museum in Igualada was the venue for the 'Leather is My Job' conference in June.

CREDIT: WTP

Leather industry reaches out to jobseekers

The second phase of the 'Leather is My Job' project, an initiative that aims to improve the European tanning industry's image in the eyes of jobseekers, reached its conclusion on June 8 with an event held in the Museu de la Pell leather museum in Igualada, Spain. It was attended by people from across Europe.

Welcoming those who made the trip to Catalonia, host Xavier Badia, president of Spanish tanning industry association Acexpiel, said that any initiative to attract young people to start a career in the leather industry was of high value. He said: "This is an interesting sector with a good future, but 'Leather Is My Job' is an important project for the future of our companies because the most important thing we have is our people."

Second phase

The project was launched at the end of 2013 by COTANCE, the representative body of the leather industry in the European Union, which runs it alongside trade union organisation industriAll. The initiative also has the support of



Dr Giorgio Gentilin, mayor of Arzignano, spoke at the conference.

CREDIT: WTP

the European Commission. The first phase of the project ran in 2014, coming to a conclusion at an event in Bucharest in October that year.

A follow-up project, mainly focusing on “enlarging and deepening” the results achieved already, began to roll out in 2016 with events in Freiberg and Milan. At these events, partners reviewed the activities that took place as part of the original project’s activities. The second phase of the project aimed to bring together industry associations and trade unions from France, Germany, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, the UK, Romania, Sweden, Italy, Austria and Hungary. It included open-days in tanneries, visits to schools, contact with employment agencies and participation in job fairs. There was also a particular effort to reach out to organisations that have not yet taken part in the initiative, particularly in central and eastern Europe.

Success story

The event this June saw a series of presentations on the work that has taken place to increase young people’s appreciation of the leather industry. During his talk, the mayor of Tuscan tanning town Fucecchio, Alessio Spinelli, said he believes an initiative aimed at young people in his region, has been a success because of the “emotional appeal of leather”.

The programme, which is called Amici Per La Pelle (Friends For Leather), has been running since 2010. It sees young people in schools around the Tuscan tanning cluster of Santa Croce visit local tanneries, learn about the processes involved in producing leather and then use the material to make their own leathergoods. As part of the 2017 exercise, Italy’s main tanning industry association, UNIC, invited 600 high-school students from Tuscany to travel to Milan to visit the Lineapelle exhibition to reinforce the work the teenagers had done.

“This initiative has found a way of transmitting real emotion and real passion to these young people,” Mr Spinelli said in Igualada. “Why do young people spend all their time on social media? It’s because they don’t have any real vision of their future. What we have found is that the leather industry can bring some real passion into their lives.”

He said it was “marvellous” for initiatives like this to have spread all over Europe as part of the ‘Leather Is My Job’ project.

Balancing act

The mayor of Arzignano, home to one of Italy’s biggest tanning clusters, Dr Giorgio Gentilin, insisted in his presentation that research and innovation are essential if the leather industry there is to keep growing while maintaining its respect for the environment. He said a “systemic approach”, with technologists, chemicals manufacturers, business leaders, industry bodies and political leaders all working together, was the key to keeping the right balance between growth and sustainability. “The environment has limits,” he said.

He confirmed that this approach in Arzignano has resulted in funding of more than €35 million for improvement projects at the cluster’s wastewater treatment plant over the next four years. Dr Gentilin said there is proof of Italy’s leadership in responsible leather production in the work that Italian technologists and tanners are now being



CREDIT: BRANCA FOJO

Portuguese entry wins photography prize

Following a meeting in Milan in 2016, the project’s organisers decided to launch a photographic competition, inviting interested parties from all over Europe to submit images of people at work in tanneries. The aim was to show the appeal of working with leather.

The organisers received 62 entries from 18 countries in six countries and the winners were unveiled at the Igualada event. The overall winner was Branca Fojo from Marsipel in Portugal (image shown above), with Ginevra Ganu from the Newport tannery in Italy in second place. There was also an award for Andrei Vesa from the Vesa leather company in Romania, whose entry won a public vote on social media.

asked to carry out to help Asian operators emulate what they have done.

Collaboration is key

The secretary general of COTANCE, Gustavo Gonzalez-Quijano, revealed at the event that representatives of the clusters at Alcanena in Portugal, Igualada in Spain and Arzignano and Santa Croce sull’Arno in Italy had held a meeting in Barcelona on June 7 to discuss new ways of working together. The COTANCE secretary general said other clusters in Europe would also be able to join the network. He added: “The clusters are interested in working together and in creating a new network that will help them find solutions to common challenges.” 🌐