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STEP TO SUSTAINABILITY - How to Implement Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear - new occupational profile and training opportunities

Progress Report

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Executive Summary

STEP TO SUSTAINABILITY is a project directed to Footwear in the field of Sustainability.

This concept had always been seen as a subject and an opportunity to the major producer of sportswear and other big brands which had been marketing their concerns about protecting the people and the environment and had been adopting an environmental friendly communication approach to the mass public. But what they did also was to open indeed a wide range of opportunities of differentiation for them and for all the players in footwear sector. They educated the consumer toward an exigent demand in terms of factors around sustainability, which involve various facets such as economic, social and environmental impact.

The market for "green shoes" is in an expanding development, reflecting the big change in the consumer behaviour, worldwide, representing a huge opportunity of growth for the Footwear sector in Europe, this time not so big brands and sportswear but especially the casual/fashion segment which is represented mainly by SME.

This project aims at supporting SMEs in the footwear sector, to create capacity to embrace this challenge – differentiation through sustainability – and improve their positioning and their rent ability. Summing to improve competitiveness through this type of differentiation.

The main operative objective of the project STEP TO SUSTAINABILITY is to design, develop and piloting a new job qualification profile and correspondent training on the subject of "Footwear Sustainable Manufacturing" able to cope with the visible shortage of vocational skills, potentiating the best use of the outcomes in the field of materials, machinery, processes, developed in the frame of many European Research & Development Projects with sustainable purposes, improving competitiveness in Footwear.

The project gathers a representative number of partners related to footwear since VET providers, private research centres, university, associations, companies and the European Confederation of Footwear Industry, an umbrella entity which represent the footwear sector from the part of the companies and all social partners.

Besides being a training project, STEP TO SUSTAINABILITY will turn into skills and competences the knowledge developed in a wide range of research and development projects in the past and still today, materialized in innovation in terms of materials, equipment, processes, etc. STEP project promote that knowledge in the profit of footwear SME and people, increasing competitiveness and employability.

At the moment, the project reach its half what lifecycle is concerned with 3 main products concluded: the Research on Occupation and Training Needs on Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear, the new occupation and qualification profile "Expert in Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear" and the Training Programme on "Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear".

The partnership is highly motivated to proceed with the following envisaged phases.

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1. Project Objectives

The Project aims at creating, designing, developing and piloting a new occupation and qualification profile of “Expert on Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear” and correspondent training course on the subject of “How to implement sustainable manufacturing in Footwear”, responding to the skills shortage in this field at VET level, targeted to Footwear and Leather Goods sector. The project also aims at anticipating the need of these skills and competences in the near future, mainstreaming it in Education & Training Systems and contributing for a systemic view on sustainable manufacturing strategies implementation in Footwear, from all stakeholders, for the benefit of the European Footwear Industry competitiveness and enhancement of job opportunities.

At this stage, STEP TO SUSTAINABILITY project as already reach some of their intentions with important impacts for the further developments. Those are i) the evidence based research on training needs and training opportunities to implement sustainable manufacturing in Footwear, with important inputs for the further stages, ii) the Profile and iii) the training programme as a basis of the contents development, with learning units defined and conceived in terms of Learning Outcomes, bridging the ECVET and EQAVET principals.

Above this central tangible objectives, the project envisage also:

- To reach to a wide range of target-groups, inside companies and outside through the availability of learning units in the field of sustainability, associating assessment procedures, transferability, validation and accumulation of learning outcomes – integration in European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). This is being achieved through an intense and effective communication strategy, as it's being done since the project starts, coordinated by the European Confederation of Footwear industry which feels deep what companies needs as well as the social partners.
- To development a b-learning course, combining e-learning component and work based learning workshops that, together, contribute for the acquisition of the defined learning outcomes, and potentiate the mass dissemination of the training, transforming it in real and accessible learning opportunities, as the project title suggests.
- To pilot the results, namely the e-learning component and the work based training workshops, involving a significant number of SMEs.
- To create awareness for the need of a sustainable manufacturing strategy as a driver of competitiveness and take it as a challenge similar to what is being undertaken by big players.
- To disseminate the results in order to optimize their mainstreaming in the Education & Training System at National and European level, transforming the deliverables in real occupations, qualifications and training opportunities.

- To exploit the results through European, national and local networks and platforms, enterprises, business organisations, guidance organisations, as well as other relevant media, inside and outside Europe.
- Last but not least, the project is being a good way of enlarging networking between the partners under an effective and qualitative management, both results oriented and respecting the differences between cultures, timings, values.

The objectives foreseen at this stage of the project are achieved and they are even over the expectations what quality is concerned, namely in terms of stakeholders involved, comprehension of the profile, opening more opportunities of training and employability, and detail of the training programme with all learning units defined with learning outcomes and credits, bridging to the ECVET.

In addition, the wideness of the dissemination and the high regularity of how project is communicated to the stakeholders, made it known all over the footwear community, around Europe and outside.

2. Project Approach

The project adopts a work plan divided into 10 work packages with a global duration of 2,5 years – 30 months. The 6 implementation work packages are linked to the main tangible project product and results. The 4 transversal work packages namely Project Management, Quality Assurance Plan and Project Evaluation, Project Dissemination and Project Exploitation are in place during all project lifetime. Each work package contains a group of activities and tasks which allow to cope with the objectives and results foreseen.

The leadership of the work plan is shared through all partners, with the exception to two partners due to their nature and dimension. The strategy here in these last two cases was to focus on the operative capacity due to the limited resources that the mentioned partners are able to address to the project. But anyway the leadership is indeed shared and methodologies exchanged and improved naturally during the project implementation.

All the effective work is balanced through all partners, having into account their competences / valences. The principal is that all partners participate in all work packages, with different roles of course, such as implementation, observation validation. The leadership of the work packages was distributed according to the correspondent partners' valences. The leadership of a work package is connected to the domain of the features of the work package.

It's been adopted a total transparency since the draft of the application. All partners were involved since the project idea and the beginning of the application draft and they know transversally and in deep all the details of the project, including budgets per partner, which they helped to elaborate, according to their competences and resources to address to the project.

Face-to-face meetings increase the opportunities to share technical issues and create knowledge. The project team have met three times till now (February 2015) and the improvements made in the project after the meetings has been notably recognized by all. Not only the stress to accomplish the dead-lines imposed by the meetings, but above all, what in fact happens after the meeting: a stronger partnership, commitments reinforced and an increase of the willing to go along a common direction/objectives. This is so, due to the knowledge produces within the discussion and the decisions taken after discussions.

A standardization of the procedures, specially what administrative and financial procedures is concerned, has been adopted since the beginning. There's a special pack for meetings with specific templates, a special pack for quality control templates, a special pack financial procedures with templates, timesheets, travel and subsistence reports, etc. It's useful for the project coordination but also for a possible auditing in the future.

Informal communications increasing the connections and keep partners linked. Partnership adopted since the beginning a strong and informal communication supported by e-mail, most of the time transversal to all mailing list. Therefore, the partners not only keep a regular communication but above all, they are constantly in connection.

The project adopts a constant quality control of the activities, tasks, outcomes, results, as defined in the Quality Assurance Plan. Everything that is done within the project is “evaluated” in terms of quality standards – indicators – agreed by all partners. We are talking about products/outcomes, but also events, meetings and even tasks such as coordination, communication, involvement of stakeholders, etc. Besides quality control, the quality assurance is framed by quantity indicators – impact indicators which are in the top of the partners’ preoccupations. For the evaluation, an external sight will be considered, through the collaboration of an external evaluator. The external evaluation pretends to be a complement of the quality control performed inside, by all partners through the coordination of the Quality Assurance Plan work package and never ever delegated completely to an external subcontracted part. The external evaluation is a collaborative process.

For the Quality and Management, both have the support of a committee which has specific roles different from the normal project team defined in the quality assurance plan

The project stands for the involving of the stakeholders in practically all the activities, seeking constantly their validation regarding products/outcomes. The project maintains and increase a strict connection with the world of work.

One of the “must” of the project was the creation of laces with Education and Training System, envisaging always further developments in terms of accreditation. The partnership wants to mainstream the outputs, so from the early stages partners promote the dissemination of the project and outcomes to the actors in this process.

The project always adopted a strong communication/dissemination approach regarding objectives, outputs, results.

Project has a commercialization approach, meaning that the outcomes are being developed under specific quality standards defined by the “market”, seeking the commercialization for the solutions after the project lifetime. Also the multilingualism is a must of the project since the effectiveness of the apprehension of the contents depends in considerable measure in the language, with referable for the mother language. So partners are making efforts to translate all the outputs.

The project has been thought, drafted and implemented under a strong technical approach – the technical capacity of the project team differentiates the project and the partnership and leads to a technical focus, what footwear manufacturing is concerned.

If we have to summarize the kind of approach is being used in the project, the key-words would be: technical in terms of footwear manufacturing, transparency of procedures, shared methodologies, strong informal communication, quality and commercialization, multilingualism.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The project outcomes are wide and have different levels of dissemination – some for target-group dissemination, others for internal usage. Some are or will be available in various languages according to the countries involved, such Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, Slovenian, Czech, Romanian, German and English.

The first one and the basis of the further work is the “**Research on occupation and training needs on sustainable manufacturing in Footwear**”, which is adopted as a reference document on the analysis of occupation in Footwear in terms of sustainability in the countries involved. The methodology included a survey - Questionnaire on installed capacity to implement Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear – applied to companies and stakeholders in general, first directly through an interview and secondly posted on-line in all languages. All together partners achieved 80 questionnaires completed in the 8 countries of the partnership and additional countries where happened to be applied through the action of CEC with the support of its associates. One of the highlighted conclusions are that the first option of the companies goes to the price variable, followed by brand and comfort. The project should adopt a positive communication what Sustainability is concerned, focused on the positive impact on price and quality/comfort in Footwear and in addition a positive environmental impact. Companies also valorise management systems implemented, based in standards, and they are willing to improve working conditions. The big problems of the companies and the major need for support is all related to production efficiency. The report is available in English and the executive summary is available in all languages of the partnership, in the project website www.step2sustainability.eu. Till the end of the project it will be available in all language, entire version.

The second outcome to be produced was the “**New occupation and qualification profile – “Expert on Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear”**” based in the research combined with already existing studies on sustainable manufacturing. The profile contains the identification of knowledge and skills/competences per activity and task defined for the “expert”. 2 levels of qualification (EQF) for the profile have been developed. The profile is already available full version in all language of the partnership, in the website www.step2sustainability.eu

The third central outcome to be produced was the “**Training Programme on Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear**” to fit the new qualification profile, according to the presuppositions of ECVET for credits transfers (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training). It was developed 2 levels of qualification. The training units merge and they should be common to both levels. In addition, the learning units/modules can be used separately for tailor-made training, and other objectives in the support of implementation of sustainable manufacturing in Footwear SMEs. The outcome is available on-line in www.step2sustainability.eu in English.

Outcomes related to Project Management such as **management platform, quality**

and financial reporting pack and **minutes** of the meetings and other reports are private, and delivered in English. As for the **Quality Assurance Plan** and **Dissemination Plan** are public and they can be consulted in the project website, in English. Another product that the project built in order to strait the connections with the stakeholders and keep a regular feed-back regarding the project impact in the sector is the **e-poll for feed-back from stakeholders** presented in the project website, where public in general can access, see the general opinion and punctuate indicators reflecting their opinion regarding the project.

The following outcomes weren't yet prepared, such as:

- Learning units targeted to the new profile and to other people in companies, with association to assessment procedures, transferability, validation and accumulation of learning outcomes achieved in formal, informal and non-formal contexts - integrating ECVET (European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training) and quality assurance principles EQAVET. The learning units/modules can be used separately for tailor-made training, and other objectives in the support of implementation of sustainable manufacturing in Footwear SMEs. They will be delivered in about 4 months;
- The b-learning course;
- Results of piloting: reports and prototypes exploitation agreements and sustainability agreement.

They constitute the aims of the following phase of the project.

In addition, the project will produce workshops for exploitation and a final conference in Italy at the end of the project.

4. Partnerships

The partnerships is constituted by 9 partners from 8 different countries:

CTCP – Centro Tecnológico do Calçado de Portugal (Portugal)
CEC – CONFÉDÉRATION EUROPÉENNE DE LA CHAUSSURE (Belgium)
TULasi - Universitatea Tehnica Gheorghe Asachi din Iasi
ISC-Germany - International Shoe Competence Center Pirmasens gGmbH
ARS SUTORIA School SRL
INESCOP - Instituto Tecnológico del Calzado
IRCUO - Industrijski razvojni center za usnjarsko in obu
KLAVENESS – Klaveness Portugal, S.A.
COKA – Česká obuvnická a kožedělná asociace

They represent the most important players in footwear production in Europe, having a relevant positioning in the Top 10 of the biggest exporters worldwide (Italy, Germany, Spain), and Top 10 of the biggest producers worldwide (Italy). 5 partners are included in the 15 most important exporters, such as Portugal which occupies the 11th position and 3 partners in the Europe Exports Top 5! In terms of type of product, 4 partners (Italy, Germany, Portugal, Spain) have a relevant positioning in the Top 10, in Leather and Waterproof footwear which are the most added value product with the highest prices . In addition, Italy gas the highest average prices, followed by Portugal which means a high level of quality and differentiation (www.worldfootwear.com).

All partners work together in a regular basis in projects in many field of action, namely training/education, R&DT, Promotion, and Sustainability, one of them was the big project CEC MADE SHOE coordinated by CEC, a structural sectorial project related to sustainability centred in the customer. They know each other very well, are take advantages of the existing synergies. Their common work was the reason of the project.

3 partners – CTCP, INESCOP and TULasi - work together in the EC ESCO project, which leads with several entities in the field of E&T and political and decision makers, having opportunity to anticipate needs and opportunities of action in benefit of their sector. The 3 partners work together in the description of the sector, concerning among other things, the occupations and identified the lack in the field of sustainability. They are experienced in defining and describing occupation profiles, allied to the expertise of TULasi in using the ECVET system.

KLAVENESS is one of the most important players in orthopaedics and health footwear in Europe. All group set up in Norway and with branches around Europe, including Portugal, is very engaged with sustainability framework. They have strong managerial and technical staff interested in the subject and willing and motivated to participate.

The partners have complementary knowledge and expertise in the multifaceted frameworks of Sustainability, since technical contents, managerial contents,

legislation, manufacturing, allowing the effective distribution of work in the work package. CEC has experience and expertise in studies and comparative research, and offers a great potential of dissemination, experience in undertaking the preparation of congresses and other dissemination events. CTCP has experience in coordinating monitoring and evaluating LDV projects, web design and e-learning expertise, being a strong IT partner.

Zavod IRCUO is the only institution in leather sector in Slovenia, as well as COKA is a string and expert association in Czech Rep. and they are interested to provide new knowledge directly and later transfer it to their reality, multiplying the impacts. ISC is a privileged partner for piloting which is a strong work package. The Italian ARS Sutoria School offers a great potential of exploitation of the final results, due to its positioning in the communication sector (their magazine) capable to reach a wide range of exploitation channels. In addition they are the most recognized school of footwear design and product engineering worldwide.

Therefore the partnership gathers all the skills/competencies and has been showing their complementarity in all phases of the project till now, not only at technical level but also at involvement in education/training and at a level of networking in the footwear sector worldwide.

The partners, so far, are very engaged with the project and the envisaged products and motivated to the activities and tasks assigned. This conclusions came out of the strong participation in the meetings, the constant communication between them and the value that each one of them add to the development of the outcomes.

The transparency, the friendly and informal climate generated and maintained since the very beginning is one of the most responsible for the good relationships registered among the partners. The quality of the communication and the proficiency in English is also one of the factors for the success.

The coordination is attentive and supportive, flexible but accurate and, above all, tolerant with differences in cultures, bringing together 8 different living and working culture around common aims.

5. Plans for the Future

The project lives nowadays a period of some changes in the type of work they develop. From the paper work of the first work packages – profile, training programme - with the exception for the research, where a constant interaction with footwear companies and other stakeholders had occurred, partner will have to lead with more and more technical issues regarding footwear and sustainability. It's very important this change of mind-set since from now on we all will be developing contents for the b-learning course.

The way how to do it, the selection of the methodologies and learning strategies, although they are indicated in the training programme, are a new challenge that partners are facing at the moment. The next meeting which will be the 4th one, will be very focus on the content development and the line for b-learning course. Under a commercialization approach, this product has to be especially accurate, rigorous, motivating but also attractive. Not only technically good and accurate – this has to be guaranteed - but also balanced between the deepness of the development of the issues and the e-learning principles which as to be applied in order to have a useful product. The design of the b-learning course runs in parallel, as well as the model to the work based workshops.

There will be more 3 meetings, minimum, and a fourth, additional meeting is being considering in this 2nd half project.

Another issue that is in the future plans are the translation activities to correspond to the multilingualism principal of the project. They are a very time-consuming task and not easily subcontracted since a technical capacity regarding footwear terminology and in this case sustainability vocabulary is demanded, besides the normal translation standards skills.

After this described short term activities, the project will enter in the piloting phase where all will be tested and adjustments will be performed. The piloting phase will produce the prototypes which will be the materialized products of the project. This is a phase that partners wait with some anxiety, nevertheless bringing a lot of challenges, in terms of preparation the trainers/coaches for the e-learning follow-up and the work based workshops, as well as selecting the companies besides the natural piloting partner which is KLAIVENESS and belongs to the partnership.

The dissemination strategy continuous, now with the focus on the project progress communication and products availability, with the normal activities and the presence in events.

As for the exploitation phase which will start after the central product is concluded, it will be focused on potentiating the commercialization of the described products, and facilitation of the training contents/units to put them closer to companies, integrated in tailor-made training strategies. One of the most expected event is the final exploitation workshop in MICAM, Milan, Italy, in March 2016 where project products and prototypes came out of the piloting phase will be presented.

In addition and not less important, the exploitation agenda envisages plans for the sustainability of the partnership itself which constitutes indeed a strong alliance for the development and innovation in Footwear sector in Europe.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The project developed and pilot a new occupational profile and training on Sustainable Manufacturing in Footwear, enabling companies to implement strategies that provoke a significant level of differentiation and increasing competitiveness. The high quality and effectiveness of the outcomes expected, innovative approaches combining e-learning and work based training, and their mainstreaming to European E&T system respecting multilingualism principles, contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning and to promote high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices .

The methodological approach combining ICT based and work based training, delivered in form of e-learning training units and training workshops in the training entities facilities or, contribute for the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning.

Addressing a problem of lack of skills and competences on an innovative subject that represents an opportunity of growth in Footwear sector in Europe, supporting participants in training and further training activities in the acquisition and use of knowledge, skills and qualifications, the project works toward the facilitation of personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market of the target-audience, including younger population form the E&T system.

The project products represent an innovative offer, crucial for the successfully assignment to a new challenge, in Footwear. The outcomes will be developed having into account principles and presupposition of the ECVET and EQAVET concerning VET quality standards, allowing transparent assessment procedures, transferability across qualifications and profiles, validation and accumulation of learning outcomes achieved in formal, informal and non-formal contexts.

The project improves the quality and the volume of co-operation between institutions throughout a strong group of representative entities related to research, training, manufacturing, promotion and negotiation in Footwear.

The envisaged outcomes privilege the acquisition of knowledge on Sustainability which comprehends multidisciplinary issues within 3 vectors: economic, environment and social. This last one refers equality as a requirement to accomplish by companies in the relationship with all stakeholders and people in the relationship with each other's. Companies and people are engaged in the promotion of equality which represents a EU concern.

The high level of technical contents involved (legislation and standardization, reengineering of processes, VOC-free production, use of dispersion adhesives, optimization of use of innovative materials, low energy consumption equipment, recyclability and biodegradability, environmental impacts, carbon imprint reducing) reflects the project innovative approach and the assignment to the SMET jobs increasing the employability of this kind of professional. The involvement in previous projects under R&D FP is responsible for the expertise installed in the partners, reflecting the articulation between research/innovation and training/employment.

7. Extra Heading/Section

In this section, the partnership would like to communicate the positive impact of the well succeeded dissemination strategy, in place since the very start moment of the project. In addition and less important, we would like to emphasise the positive impact of the regular meetings organized by EACEA, focused on management, financial, dissemination issues among others, which have been important opportunities of learning for the coordinator, exchange ideas and problem solving with other coordinator.

The dissemination strategy has being based on the following items:

- A strong presence of the project in various events regarding footwear, innovation and sustainability.
- A quality communication in e-newsletters, magazines, journals and press releases.
- A strong visual (corporate) image, attractive and very connected to the “green” thinking, inspired on nature, people and footwear, easily linked to the project and recognized all over. It really reached people and companies who frequently ask for questions related to the project and products.
- An attractive, clean and regularly updated project website with communication purposes but also captivating the stakeholder to be linked to the project, giving their opinion, suggestions, making questions, requesting support. www.step2sustainability.eu
- An involving dissemination plan considering the important add value of all partners, well-coordinated by the most adequate partner for this task – the umbrella entity (CEC) established in Brussels, with a wide network and understanding of the communication channels. Each newsletter, each post and each presence in an event matter, if they are well selected and prepared in a positive way.

The dissemination dimension helped to spread out the project and the sustainability issue itself, to create awareness, with positive impact on the increasing connection of the partners around common objectives. Above all difficulties that rise constantly and constitute challenges to the project management, partner are committed to common objectives and are willing to work in the project work packages, more and more.

European Commission, namely DG Education and Culture, DG Environment, have been very dynamic in the follow-up of the project. The project was the target of some invitations to be presented in few important events, with interesting impact on the project development itself, on its visibility, on the motivation of the partnership and further exploitation activities. One of them was the recent ECO Innovation Forum hold in Lyon, France, last December 2014.

With this statement, the STEP TO SUSTAINABILITY project partnership expects to create positive advice to the new projects and specially congratulate EACEA for the accurate and always attentive support, including anticipating coordinator’s needs.

