



Reshaping the Future – Innovation and collaboration at the core of the 7th World Footwear Congress

Last week, the seventh edition of the World Footwear Congress, co-organised by the European Footwear Confederation (CEC) and the Footwear Industrialists Association of Türkiye (TASD) was celebrated in Istanbul with over 300 participants from five continents. The Congress, an initiative of the CEC launched twenty years ago, was the occasion to gather worldwide public and private representatives of the footwear industry to identify solutions to Reshape the Future of the footwear sector.

In the opening, CEC President Luis Onofre underlined the resilience of footwear industry despite the different sanitary, economic and geopolitical crisis of the recent years: *“My grandmother, who witnessed the funding of our family business in 1939, used to say that the footwear industry has never had a peaceful moment. Only by joining efforts and working together we are able to respond to the challenges and grasp the opportunities the world is bringing to us and to ensure a smooth green, digital and just transition of our industry”*. His call for international collaboration was echoed in each panel of the Congress.

The footwear sector must work on a new way to understand that a shoe not only has more than 8000 years of history, but it also represents our main mean of transportation, which stresses the complexity of the product in all aspects. Having this mission in mind, representatives of leading footwear companies and other experts presented their experiences on three main areas.

Firstly, the audience could learn more on the adaptation of business strategies with the current demands, led by a more conscious consumer, and the adoption of new technologies, methods, and tools. Digitalisation is the key of success, allowing for example the analysis of big data for the identification of the target consumer, the development of customised products and services, the improvement of customer services in e-commerce, and the optimisation of the production process.

Then, in line with our reality, sustainability played a major role in the Congress. Everybody is aware that there is not a Plan(et) B and, as inhabitant of the same planet, we must find joint mitigating solutions. However, when everything is categorised as sustainable without a methodology, the use of the term sustainability is becoming “unsustainable”. The industry has the duty to define a joint definition of sustainability that goes beyond the environmental dimension and to communicate it to the consumers, the real enablers of change.

Finally, the last part of the Congress focused on the future of the workforce, the main asset of the industry, in a sector in the middle of the generational change. Companies demonstrated their new approach to positively engage and retain the young generations with a more flexible and community driven strategy. Calls for support from national authorities were stressed as essential to achieve this goal.

An upgraded footwear industry is possible through a synergy between innovation and sustainability thanks to the fundamental contribution of digitalisation, but without neglecting the crucial role of human capital in the upcoming industry 5.0. In other words, the footwear sector must project itself towards a human-centric approach, and only the cooperation among all the actors of the footwear community worldwide will allow its envisaged development.

The participants shared full satisfaction with the discussions and outcomes of this World Footwear Congress edition. By embracing the words of President Onofre, the CEC is committed to maintaining its role as facilitator for a sustainable future of the sector.

Last but not least, the CEC would like to thank once more all the speakers and moderators who intervened in the Congress for their fruitful contribution, all participants for their support to the footwear sector and, last but not least, TASD President Berke İçten and the organisation team for making the event successfully happen.