Like the major fashion houses they supply, tanners are examining their own eco-responsibility, constantly striving to improve their environmental impact. To further a discussion around Smart Creation in the leather sector, on February 7th, Première Vision brought together three experts: Marta Fumei, Head of Marketing and Communications at DaniGroup; Rossella Ravagli, Head of Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility at Gucci; and Francesco Marchi, Managing Director of Euratex for a discussion led by Giusy Bettoni*.

As an introduction to this conversation, Bettoni recalled the words of environmental journalist Mike Redhood: “Leather is an organic recycled material and that means that the job of tanner is the oldest recycling profession in the world. It is a craft that humanizes technology and needs to be safeguarded. To do that, the leather industry must evolve in order to remain relevant to consumers.” On this point, everyone agrees. “Yet why is it that when we ask fashion students around the world which brand is the most responsible, 99% of them answer H&M?” asked Bettoni. “It’s because H&M underlines and advertises their eco-responsibility, while luxury brands don’t. So we have to do better, but above all, we have to communicate what we are doing.” And in terms of doing better, just how is the leather industry doing?

As Marta Fumei explained, we can now trace a product’s entire production chain, from its water use, to recycling of waste, to monitoring chemicals used to tan the skins, and more. And the issue of the tanning is still quite complex. Historically, there are two types of tanning, tied to the intended use of the skin.
“Chrome tanning, which represents, globally, 85% of all tanning, results in a very resistant leather. It’s perfect for a product that will undergo sizable stress when put into production, like for shoes. On the other hand, vegetable tanning is preferred for less extreme uses, for products that can acquire a nice patina over time,” explained Marc Brunel, Première Vision Leather show director. These two tanning processes pose no environmental problems when well managed and rigorously controlled, as is the case for European and Brazilian tanneries.

“Today improvement is still needed in terms of the traceability between animal breeding and leather tanning,” noted Brunel. “The tests piloted by the Fédération française de la tannerie and the Conseil national du cuir have provided convincing results, and now need to be tested on an industrial scale.”

To help textile industry companies become more responsible, Euratex’s Marchi presented a tool, soon to be made available online, to assess need and measure progress in terms of already existing commitments. “This tool takes into account the growing demand for transparency. Today, a company that isn’t eco-responsible runs the risk of getting a tarnished reputation and losing its clients...”

"TRACEABILITY IS A KEY ISSUE FOR A COMPANY LIKE GUCCI, WHOSE PRODUCTS ARE ENTIRELY MADE IN ITALY. TO GET THE BEST QUALITY, WE HAVE TO BE SURE OF OUR RAW MATERIALS. OUR GOAL IS TO ACHIEVE 85% TOTAL TRACEABILITY BY 2018 AND 100% BY 2025.”

Rossella Ravagli, Head of Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility at Gucci

"TRANSPARENCY IS OUR GUIDING WORD. FOR TWO YEARS WE’VE BEEN PUBLISHING A REPORT ON ECO-RESPONSIBILITY, WITH ALL OUR FIGURES, FROM HOW MUCH WATER WE USED TO OUR EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION. IT HAS THE NAMES OF ALL THE CHEMICALS USED, WHERE OUR ANIMALS CAME FROM ... AND OUR TANNERIES ARE ALWAYS OPEN TO VISITORS.”

Marta Fumei, head of marketing and communications at DaniGroup

"LEATHER IS NOT VEGAN
Leather, an animal by-product, cannot, by definition, be vegan. In France, a decree was passed in 2010 to protect the word “leather”, which is a material of animal origin and the product of the transformation of a skin by tanners and tawers. The term “vegan” cannot thus be attached to the word “leather”. To avoid any confusion on the part of consumers who think they are using a non-polluting natural product, awareness operations are being undertaken at fashion houses employing this expression in their collection planning on websites.

CONTACTS PRESSE

Première Vision
Igor Robinet-Slansky
T. +33(0)1 70 38 70 30
M. +33(0)6 42 06 31 02
i.robinet@premierevision.com

2e Bureau
Marie-Laure Girardon
T. +33(0)1 42 33 93 18
M. +33(0)6 82 40 73 27
m.girardon@2e-bureau.com

Première Vision
Juliette Sébille
T. +33(0)1 70 38 70 33
M. +33(0)6 88 22 12 40
j.sebille@premierevision.com