

Brief profile of subproject

Harmonisation of standards for a “more sustainable” leather chemistry

Rev092020-1

1. Challenges

The United Nations' goal is to achieve of the safe use of chemical substances throughout their entire life cycle (see SDG 12.4 of UN "[Agenda 2030](#)") by the year 2020. In Europe, for example, the REACH Regulation contributes to this goal by increasing transparency on substances (and their properties) in products, but also by setting limit values, e.g. for problematic substances in leather. In (e.g. Asian) third countries with relevant shares of leather exports to the EU, there are no nationwide production requirements comparable to those of the EU. As a result, production costs are lower there. In addition, both in third countries and, to a lesser extent, in EU countries, there are shortcomings in the enforcement of regulations for the protection of health and the environment. Heterogeneous framework conditions lead to considerable differences depending on the local production standard. This holds true with regard to the processes (e.g. immission and emission-related precautionary measures, health protection) and the resulting products (e.g. detection of problematic substances in critical quantities, but also material quality). At the same time, this has an effect on markets as products created at comparatively high costs compete with those originating from comparatively cheap production.

With a view to harmonising production conditions across national borders, industry initiatives are developing governance structures - including instruments (e.g. standards) for chemicals management in the supply chain (e.g. [ZDHC](#)) or auditing schemes for leather (e.g. [LWG](#)). The organisations also make efforts to interlink these instruments. However, this process still is partly cumbersome and leaves questions unanswered. One reason for that might be that the instruments have been developed focusing on different groups of actors (e.g. textile chains, tanneries) and also have different conceptual designs. Moreover, it can also be observed that such initiatives are particularly attractive for well-positioned front runners, looking for ways to further sharpen their environmentally conscious profile. On the other hand, there is a lack of buy-in for the broad mass of companies, particularly the smaller ones.

2. Objective & project description

The project aims to harmonise existing standards with a view to “more sustainable” leather chemistry and improve them, where appropriate. It is based on an analysis of existing legal and private standards (and their implementation). In contrast, the project does not aim to create a new standard. Central actors are the above-mentioned, predominantly private-sector governance arrangements and multi-stakeholder organisations, also including the UNIDO Leather-Panel. A unification of standards and recommendations at this level could provide impetus for legislators to further pursue internationally harmonised leather production.

As for the contents of standards, the particular focus is on the use and evaluation of chemicals, working conditions and knowledge transfer in the supply chain and to the consumer. The project integrates the requirements of all relevant actors and develops quality criteria for the evaluation of different approaches. Improvements can, for example, mean increasing the interoperability of existing systems (e.g. recognition by system A of a company's achievements in system B), stricter substantive requirements, new structural elements (committees, instruments, etc.) or changing roles. Recommendations to legislators and (international) organizations are another intended output.

3. Research and transfer questions:

What are the requirements for an international standard for a "more sustainable" leather chemistry?

Which relevant legal and private standards exist and what is the status of implementation?

What gaps ("delta") exist between 1 and 2 and what options are there to reduce them?

4. Structure

A tandem consisting of one representative from the Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences and one from practise coordinates the project. Anyone interested can participate in the project.

The cooperation takes place via meetings / web conferences / workshops.

Project group coordination

Representing Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences: **Julian Schenten**

Representing the leather sector: **#tbd**

Development plan:

Essential project steps (partly running in parallel)	Formats
0. initiate project group	Agreement on short profile; kick-off webinar
1. invite additional relevant actors (including international organisations such as UNIDO)	Network analysis, use existing contacts; "sponsoring".
2. determine goals: Identify relevant criteria / requirements of the standard to be developed, determine geographic and personal scope of application etc.	Preparatory work by means of surveys (quantitative + qualitative); concluding (online) workshop
3. analyse existing standards (with implementation practice): To what extent are existing standards congruent / differ from each other? Where are gaps to the objectives?	preliminary work by means of (literature) research, expert interviews; concluding (online) workshop
4. round table / establish a central (multi-stakeholder) decision-making body	
5. develop strategy with regard to "Harmonisation of leather standards by XXX" (e.g. 2035)	Preparatory work by means of surveys (quantitative + qualitative); concluding (online) workshop
6. implement measures in accordance with the strategy, including	
6a. Further develop existing standards	Expert interviews, creative workshop
6b. Develop business models for different actors	(Literature) research, expert interviews
6c. Develop strategic partnerships (e.g. define with actors in third countries)	Networking
6d. Develop a monitoring concept for compliance with the standard (indicators etc.)	Surveys (quantitative + qualitative), creative workshop
7. ensure dissemination	"Advertising", create policy papers, integrate central intermediaries