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11 "stories" of Italian footwear businesses

**Innovating as craftspeople:
a new book about family footwear businesses,
edited by LIUC**

Italy is a landmark for the footwear industry. It is the European Union's leading producer of shoes and ranks eleventh in the world for the number of pairs made. And many of its businesses are family-run. The latest book in the Università Cattaneo Libri series, published by Guerini Next, is dedicated to these family businesses. It is called "***L'impresa calzaturiera di famiglia. Storie di una generazione che innova***", [***"The family footwear business. Stories of an innovative generation"***] and is edited by Valentina Lazzarotti (associate professor at the School of Industrial Engineering) and Federico Visconti (Rector of the Cattaneo-LIUC University).

In step with the last book dedicated to family businesses ("*Family Up – Il giovane imprenditore tra continuità e cambiamento*" [*"Family Up – The young entrepreneur amidst continuity and change"*]), the book is a journey to discover **11 examples of excellence in the industry. SMEs located in various areas of Italy** (predominantly in the Marche region but also with companies based in Lombardy, Veneto, Campania and Tuscany), spanning **all stages of the supply chain**, from shoe-last manufacturers and tanneries to sole and heel manufacturers.

"The book," explained Valentina Lazzarotti, "*is the fruit of an initiative by the **Assocalzaturifici** trade association, whose aim, through this study, was to shine the spotlight on the sector's centres of excellence, examining their dynamics and strategies. On the one hand, there is an attempt to deal with the crisis by keeping costs down, including through **process automation**; on the other, there is the need to **"remain craftspeople"**, to guarantee beautiful Italian design, which makes these companies **invaluable partners for the big designer labels**. The typical dynamics of family businesses fit into this context*".

In this regard, there are five categories of **objectives** guiding the choices of young entrepreneurs to innovate with respect to their predecessors. According to the specialist literature, these categories are typical of family businesses: family control of and influence on the business, identification and sense of belonging, attention to forging lasting relations with the various stakeholders, emotional loyalty and devotion among family members, desire to preserve the family dynasty.

These objectives take on a special meaning among the young people interviewed and are capable of setting in motion certain **key factors of innovation** (in terms of resource

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allocation, facilities and systems, and organisational learning).

In turn, these create **dimensions of innovation**, which can be observed as changes in the way innovation itself is organised or in the results it produces (new products, new business models, new production processes, etc.)

"In addition to the choices made to manage innovation and besides its results," continued Valentina Lazzarotti, "many other aspects surfaced from the cases examined, such as the internationalisation of these businesses, involvement of individuals from outside the family and the role of women at the top."

The following businesses told their story in the book: **Formificio STF, Conceria Sicerp, Suolificio Mannini Romano, Tacchificio Villa Cortese, Vittorio Virgili, Calzaturificio Gardenia, Missouri, Moda Di Fausto, Calzaturificio Brunate, Tedeschi Calzature and Loriblu.**

*"It would appear that the 'way is being paved for innovation' in the footwear industry," explained the **Rector, Federico Visconti**, in the conclusion to the book, "the essential ingredients of which are to be found in the ways in which the critical factors behind innovative processes are activated, in the systematic opening to the contribution of third-party players, in the force linking measures taken to results achieved, in the quest to strike a new balance between the interests of the family that owns the business and the growth objectives of their business".*

*"Our industry has always faced complex changes, but perhaps nowadays it finds itself addressing one of the greatest challenges: the paradigm shift towards a business logic which, while not neglecting the family origin, moves towards managerial forms, open to external collaboration and mindful of market development," commented **Annarita Pilotti**, Assocalzaturifici Chair. "The encouraging snapshot of our industry offered by this book may therefore urge companies to change and offer them some strategies to consider."*

The development of knowledge in the area of family businesses is also providing the content for a new course at LIUC, called **Family Business Management**, as part of the **three-year Bachelor's degree** in Business Economics, with specific training taught in English.

Milan, 26 June 2019

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