

## **The creation of, and experimentation with, product traceability methods, concerning phases of production and the raw materials used.**

### **Motives**

Awareness is spreading among operators in the textile sector that if they wish to maintain, let alone increase, the competitiveness of Italian textile/clothing products in an increasingly global market, they will have to go beyond entrenching themselves in unthinking protectionist attitudes.

Conditions have to be created whereby consumers are able to appreciate products for their effective quality, because they are aware not just of what has been done but also of how it has been done.

If the aim is to protect the consumer's interests then the consumer has also to be given the information necessary for them to appreciate real quality. At the moment clients simply don't have enough information to be able to choose according to the origin and quality of the raw materials used or the nature of the manufacturing processes applied.

It is therefore extremely important to define a policy and a specific project capable of creating production methods and checking systems that provide real and practical traceability for textile clothing items, a matter closely related to the need to define a protocol of quality standards and a related recognizability trademark.

Within the hypoallergenic fabric project, the companies belonging to the "VIS Vestire in Salute" Consortium have tested a product traceability system which also involved yarn suppliers, thus implementing an example of traceable mini supply chain.

This experience has also enabled to improve the information flow between companies and, above all, to significantly increase the quality of the textile product, since they all contributed to planning the final product features.

### **Traceability System**

#### **Introduction**

Current EU sector regulations do not make it compulsory to indicate a product's origin, they simply forbid false indications designed to mislead the consumer. The consumer often perceives a product's value through the information provided about it, and the producing nation or geographic area can often constitute an important indicator of quality.

Even indicating "Made in Italy" is not compulsory, and in the short term it's unlikely that the European Commission will be able to bring in regulations to this end, given the hostility of Northern European countries and major retailing chains.

At the same time, the Italian fashion system benefits substantially from indicating the manufacturing process and origin of its products, because this is a major added value factor that can be used to increase competitiveness through communication, image and marketing campaigns.

**Objective of the companies forming "the VIS Vestire in Salute" Consortium is to arrange for the traceability and relevant 'voluntary' certification capable of providing the consumer with a certified and guaranteed brand of origin.**

#### **Organisation**

Any product certification is workable only if all the companies involved in the production chain can be traced. From this viewpoint, the companies involved in **Consorzio VIS Vestire in Salute** enjoy various advantages:

- their number is relatively low
- they each carry out complementary functions in the manufacturing phases of weaving, dyeing and finishing.

These participating companies work as sub-contracted manufacturers for other companies, and are able to certify the origin of their raw materials, the threads employed, the manufacturing cycle, the products used in treatments, and the characteristics of the finished textiles.

A major advantage for clothing companies who wish to make traceability (and quality) a distinguishing feature of their products.

In the ambit of Traceability System each company has to declare whether all the productive phases assigned to it have been carried out directly by itself or, even on a few exceptional occasions, subcontracted to external collaborators. In the latter case the external subcontracting collaborator has to provide the information necessary to establish origin traceability.

Each company must in any case be able to establish the exact situation of the orders being worked on and to provide information at the end of each manufacturing phase and at each partial or final payment for the goods it has worked on.

The company's code number and the batch number must appear on all documents concerning current jobs, so that the commissioning companies have precise references for their internal data and documentation, and to offer a second possible record of traceability alongside or in alternative to the digital version; thanks to the use of identifying code numbers, the subcontracted company was always able to reconstruct the history of its order both at computer and paperwork levels.

The companies belonging to the **VIS (Vestire in Salute, Wearing Healthy Clothes) Consortium** have tested the Traceability System during the preparation of sample prototypes and the making of garments to be submitted to practical cloth-wearing tests run by the University of Modena's Dermatology Clinic.

Traceability was not the only aspect being investigated, but also continual checking of the state of the manufacturing process and checking of the materials employed in it.

Another important factor was the care taken to avoiding that a given batch was not mixed with other batches being worked on (in parallel production), so as to avoid possible "contamination" by other materials, whether threads, oils, weaving machines, colorants, auxiliaries or others....

The **Consorzio VIS Vestire in Salute** companies' experience of production checking during the manufacture of 230 textiles for cloth-wearing tests, and in the preparation of sample textiles, is certainly not highly significant in terms of numbers, but it is extremely significant in terms of mentality, because it stimulated all the participants to commit themselves to providing as much information as possible.

The **VIS Consortium** will adopt its own Traceability System in order to certify any textile which shall then bear the "**VIS Vestire in Salute**" brand.