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Lecco, a tradition in textiles

A TRADITION LASTING OVER FIVE CENTURIES: THIS IS THE TEXTILE DISTRICT OF LECCO, SPECIALISED IN FURNISHING FABRICS. MORE THAN 60 PERCENT OF SALES ARE FOR THE FOREIGN MARKET, ABOVE ALL TO THE UNITED STATES, GERMANY AND GREAT BRITAIN.



It is one of the Italian territories with the oldest origins for traditional industry and which today represents a standard of excellence in the productive panorama of the country. This is the Lecchese industrial district for textiles, situated just a short distance to the north of Milan. The origin of textile manufacturing in this area dates back, in fact, to the time of the Renaissance, when mulberry growing became widespread in the supply of raw material to Milanese silk producers. However, soon the inhabitants of the area began to use their products directly and under the Spanish domination at the end of the 16th century it was possible to carry out production in that area. Towards the middle of the 17th century, 14 silk mills were functioning. In the 18th century a third of all the functioning silk mills were concentrated in this area, comprising 29 percent frames for spinning and 58 percent frames for twisting. Raw silk production took up an ever-increasing quota of work in this area, and in 1835 more than one hundred mulberry trees for every 10 hectares were present.

This tradition was never abandoned. Today the Lecchese textile district, which is spread over an area of nine towns (seven in the province of Lecco, two in Como: Barzago, Bulciago, Costa Masnaga, Garbagnate Monastero, Nibionno, Rogeno, Sirone, Lambrugo e Merone) represents one of the central reference points for the Italian textile industry. Production today, now that silk has been forsaken as the sole product, is now specialised in the sector of furnishing fabrics, especially jacquard and velvets, aimed at the highest market band. More than 60 percent of sales are achieved abroad, but some firms achieve a quota of 80 percent of production, above all for Germany and Great Britain.

A highly specialised, vital and flexible industrial sector, which, over the course of years has conquered markets all over the world and has become known as much for its high quality standards as for its excellent propensity for innovation, the strong interaction between firms and the significant territorial centralisation.

Most firms in the district have a family-type structure, even if many of them have by now arrived at the fourth generation of entrepreneurs. Therefore these are small firms, with a strong artisan presence which, thanks to

local firms which have developed along the whole productive chain, are able to offer to the market a complete range of products. The average size of the firms in the district is of around 20 employees, with just one firm having more than 500 employees. The 30 largest firms carry out 80 percent of sales for the district and have an average of 86 employees.

Within this framework the district has launched a number of industrial promotional initiatives to great effect. In the first place it has been decided to study the application of a trademark to identify products produced by industries in the district as a reminder of the old local industrial traditions, but above all to give an identity to a product which, under a quality profile, numbers very few competitors at the international level. In second place, to promote a knowledge of the Lecchese industrial district, but also to offer firms effective support for their trading activities, a website has been created, www.leccotextile.com, which allows not only for obtaining information on the historical and economic features of the district but also for finding pointers on trade and support services for activities and management of firms in the sector. This platform also provides a database of the Lecchese textile firms, an on-line shop window of participating firms and some useful and applicable up-to-date information.

Area: Provinces of Lecco e Como
Specialised production, furnishing textiles
Number of towns: 9
Surface area: 33 sq km
Population: 23.000 inhabitants
Number of firms: 162
Employees: 3,300
Overall sales: 750 million euro
Export quota: 62%