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SYSTEMEX : THE DRIVING WHEEL TOWARDS MORE INTELLIGENT TEXTILE SYSTEMS

- Workshop on strategies for commercialisation of smart fabrics in healthcare lead markets in Europe took place January 18 in Eindhoven
 - 15 participants from research, industry and academia discussed major bottlenecks and how to achieve a quicker way for products to the market
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SYSTEMEX, an ICT project of the Seventh Framework Programme, is a coordinated action project that is commissioned to initiate actions helping to overcome hurdles which are currently slowing down the breakthrough of the Smart Fabrics and Interactive Textiles (SFIT) sector in Europe.

During a one day workshop experts from various fields and different European countries discussed the challenges that European stakeholders are facing in the process of commercialisation. In a recent report by UK based market research company Pira International the healthcare sector is mentioned as one of the key application areas for the SFIT sector in the near future. Forecasts from the US market research company Venture Development Corporation (VDC) suggested an increase in sales of smart fabrics and interactive textiles for sensing and monitoring by 49,3 % between 2006 and 2010. The EU funded project Clevertex has also projected the healthcare sector as the most promising area for SFIT. Against those encouraging data and figures the commercialisation process is still too slow. There are established textiles and electronics industries, but a lack of killer applications & the necessary market pull for functional textiles. Among other parameters clear industry standards and certification requirements are missing, there is a lack of stronger cooperation between industry and science, little knowledge of accessibility of financial possibilities and a lack of leadership by system integrators.



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One of the overriding results was the postulation of interdisciplinary calls at EU level. There is a strong lack of a critical mass in new multi-disciplinary supply chains. **Christian Daalsgard, Managing Director Ohmatex Aps, Denmark** gave a presentation on the huge potential of the telecare and healthcare markets and illustrated the crucial market drivers for the upcoming decade. Stated were the Olympic Games 2012, an ageing population, The NASA program as well as EU FP7 initiatives. The major bottleneck for a more rapid commercialisation of smart fabrics' based products for healthcare is the immense investment that is needed, since the validation process of new products takes 5-7 years with clinical trials and specifications – for a textile SME a far too long and costly business cycle, if not supported by a strategic partner that has the financial strength and endurance. **Anton Kaasjager, project leader innovative materials, TNO Science and industry, Netherlands** called for a stronger commitment of the leading industry players: "Based on a clear business plan globally operating industry leaders like Philips or Nokia should take the lead." Textiles are just a carrier. A systems approach is necessary to bring successful products on the market that find consumer acceptance and grant interoperability. **Prof. Dr. med. Norbert Gretz, Managing director Institut für Medizintechnologie, Heidelberg, Germany** suggested to concentrate in research & development on disposables to avoid major legal implications. Intelligent ambient environments in hospitals and nursing homes for the elderly could be the framework for chronically ill patients or persons in the rehabilitation process to be monitored and inhibit complications. The cost factor nursing staff could be considerably reduced. During the group discussions the perception came about that a fundamental new approach is needed already at EU level when initiating new programs. There should be more space for short term innovation as well.

The 12 SYSTEX partners are as follows:

1. Ghent University, Department of Textiles – project coordinator: Prof. Lieva van Langenhove
<http://www.textiles.ugent.be>



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2. Smartex, an Italian company whose mission is R&D and production of systems where textile and non-textile sensors and electronics are integrated into wearable solutions. www.smartex.it
3. CEA, a public organization composed of 15000 employees, that does technological research in the areas of energy, information, health technologies and defence.
4. UNIPI, University of Pisa is represented by the Interdepartmental Research Center E. Piaggio. . www.unipi.it
5. CNR-INFN, National Institute of Physics of Matter – National Research Council, Centre S3, based in Genoa, Italy
6. IMEC, The Interuniversitair Micro-Electronics Centrum in Leuven, Belgium
7. Philips Research, department of biomedical sensor systems, Eindhoven, the Netherlands
8. Multitel, a privately owned and non-profit research centre in Mons, Belgium – www.multitel.be
9. IFTH, Institut Français Textile et Habillement is the French textile and clothing technical center. With its 280 collaborators IFTH focuses on R&D in the high added value sector for different market segments: clothing, transport, health and building.
10. Anne Demoor bvba, legal advisor, based in Belgium www.corversdemoor.be
11. IHOFMANN a consultancy and communication agency with international orientation operating in the niche market of innovative technical textiles and technologies in their various applications. www.ihofmann.com
12. Plastic Electronics Foundation, a non-profit organisation, established in April 2005, based in Eindhoven, the Netherlands www.plastic-electronics.org

The project duration is from June 2008 until June 2011.

Please take a look at the web portal:

<http://www.systemex.org>



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