

THREAD

THREADs that Connect
Social Innovation through Textiles



by
Else Skjold
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We invite you to take a moment to join our THREAD network. THREAD a needle with your own choice of THREAD to connect the dots on the cover.

Experience the contemplative calm and creativity of craft. This is the shared experience on which the THREAD network was built.

The project described here is over but the THREADs continue to connect.

What's your passion? Can you share it to connect with refugees and build a new community?

Else, Marie-Louise, Jane & Anne Louise

Please do share a photo of your completed cover on our Facebook page at Thread - Den Røde Tråd and give us feedback on this book.

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Foreword

This book is intended to provide inspiration and advice to the members of any social group that would like to make a difference in the world. Social integration is a challenge for refugees and migrants in many countries where they have been welcomed. Integration is not only the responsibility of governments or the refugees themselves, it is a two-way process. Any group of people which wishes to extend a welcome to refugees in their community can do so by sharing their passion with the newcomers. THREAD shared its passion for textiles but any activity that brings people together for fun and friendship can do the same – sport, food, gardening, dance, cars – all can be catalysts for integration. This book charts the THREAD experiment by describing some of its experiences and outcomes and offers a toolkit for future projects built along the same lines.

In 2016, the Innovation Fund Denmark (IFD) identified refugee integration as a specific challenge in need of imaginative solutions. THREAD began as an innovative vision among a team of arts and humanities academics who saw the potential for making a difference in Danish society. The Centre for Textile Research at the University of Copenhagen reached out to colleagues at other educational and research institutions and looked beyond academia to build a collaborative network, which shared their vision of using textile craft and culture as a catalyst for change among refugee women.

The successful proposal to IFD was to deliver a themed model of integration by mapping and testing how a new supportive network could empower refugee women and, through this, create employment opportunities and inspire entrepreneurship. The development of this model progressed much like designing and testing a prototype product. Early work concentrated on building connections with refugees and to the decision makers in the integration system, identifying stakeholders, culture brokers, social workers and companies, with the help of internal and external project partners. These connections were made through frustrating trial-and-error experiences, which sometimes led to dead ends and sometimes to successes.

THREAD was an unusual project for the IFD in that it was a social enterprise developing a concept for change rather than a commercial company making a product. Nevertheless, its defining characteristic was that it was innovative and therefore likely to disrupt the existing refugee support system. A significant finding in this context was that it is very difficult “to make a difference” even with the best of intentions, high energy and strong commitment when the current system simply does not provide any cracks through which a new way of working can squeeze.

This book is structured using the “double diamond” model of innovation developed by the British Design Council in 2005. It encompasses four phases of activity: discover, define, develop and deliver. This matches the innovation management process advocated by Stokes, Wilson and Mador (2010), which recognises the need to scan the environment, evaluate opportunities, acquire resources and develop the market. The THREAD team was selling an idea about how to have a positive effect on refugee women’s integration and it was difficult at times to determine whether this was succeeding or failing – a challenge tackled by the evaluators from Aalborg University’s Global Refugee Studies research group.

DISCOVER phase – identifying opportunities and developing initial ideas with internal and external partners through an events programme.

DEFINE phase – gathering further information and running the prototypes for specific event formats.

DEVELOP phase – discarding the unsuccessful formats and pursuing successful ones for further development and testing.

DELIVER phase – reviewing, analysing and formulating the outcomes of the project. Developing legacy projects for selected aspects of the project to be continued and improved.

This book is dedicated first and foremost to all the refugee and migrant women who took part in the textile workshops and other activities of THREAD.

It is intended to inform, inspire and illustrate the potential of a themed social network as a driver of successful refugee integration for social workers, support agencies, policy makers, researchers and students – primarily those who are working with refugees – who can identify themes which appeal to specific groups of citizens in the hope of bringing people together in new ways through shared passions.

Admiring and enjoying handicraft



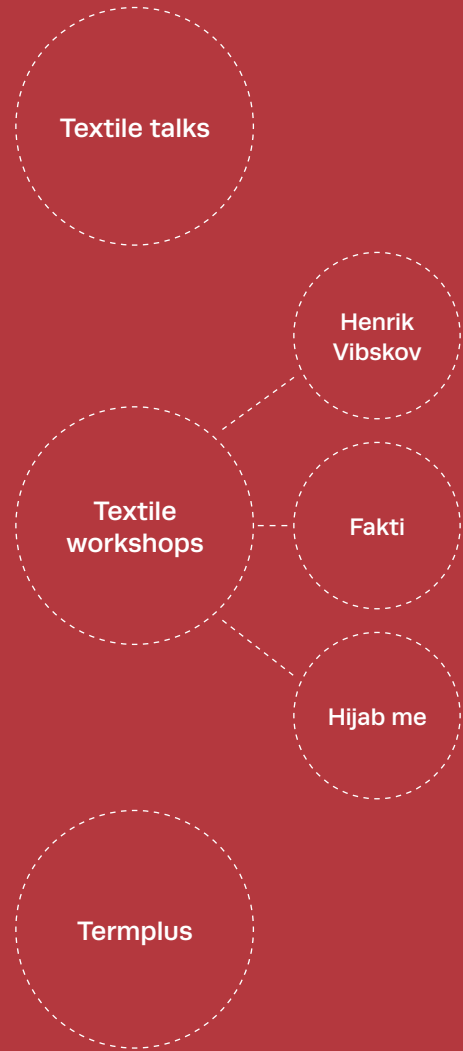
Textile print workshop



THREAD OUTCOMES

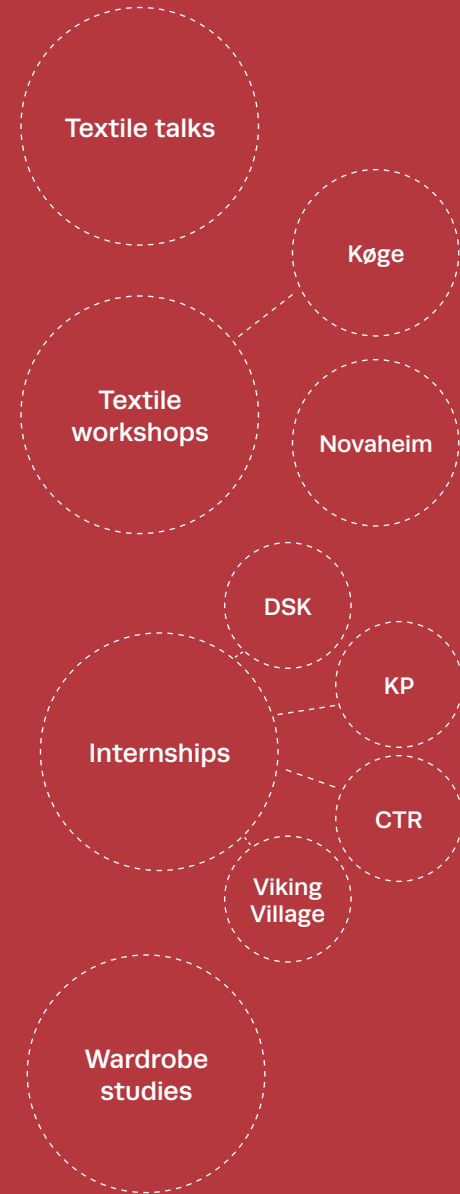
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DISCOVER



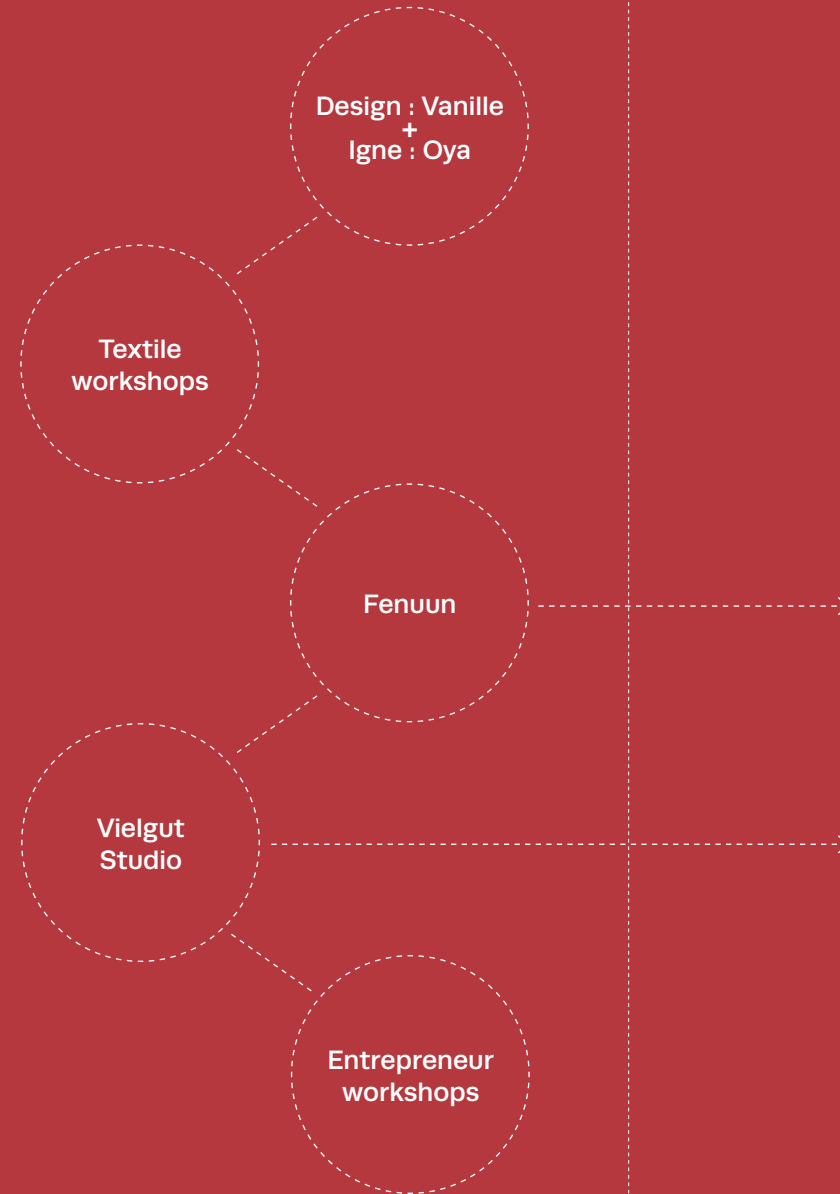
2018

DEFINE



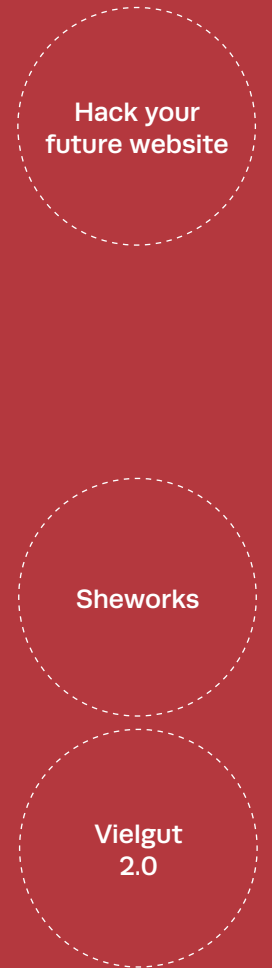
2018

DEVELOP



2019

DELIVER





Auto-biographical embroidery from Tingbjerg

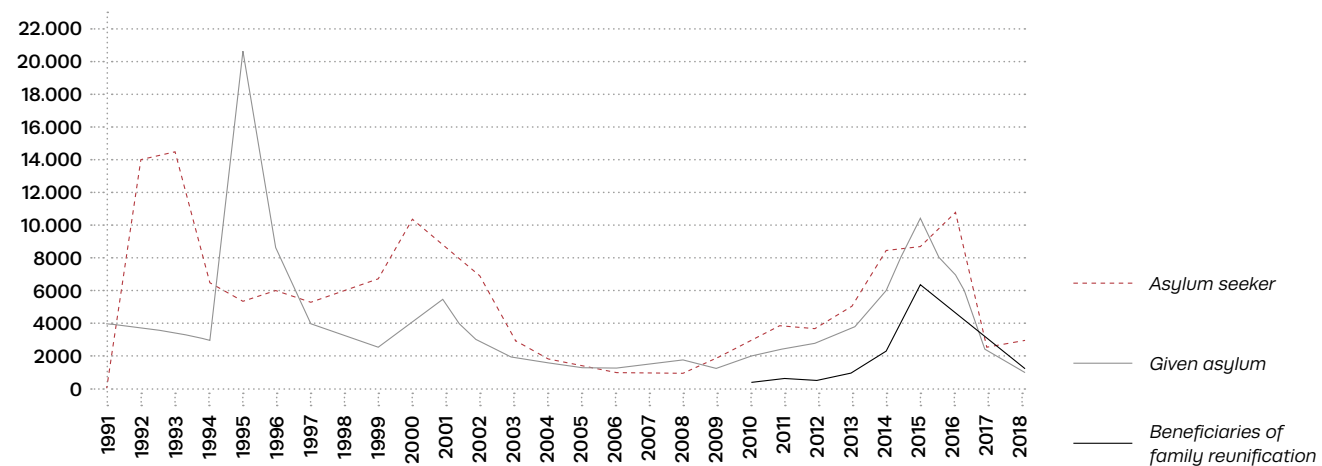
DISCOVER

The Textile Hub for Refugee Empowerment, Employment and Entrepreneurship Advancement in Denmark (THREAD) explored whether textile craft and culture could be catalysts for improved integration for refugee women. THREAD is a dynamic and innovative collaboration of diverse partners from business, design, education, research and refugee support agencies aiming to achieve life-changing results for women who are forging new lives in Denmark. The hub's main premise is that refugees are a welcome resource for Denmark's future and not an inevitable burden on its economy. In particular, THREAD acknowledges that refugee women have competences and capacities in textile crafts, which are not currently recognised or identified by the official labour market.

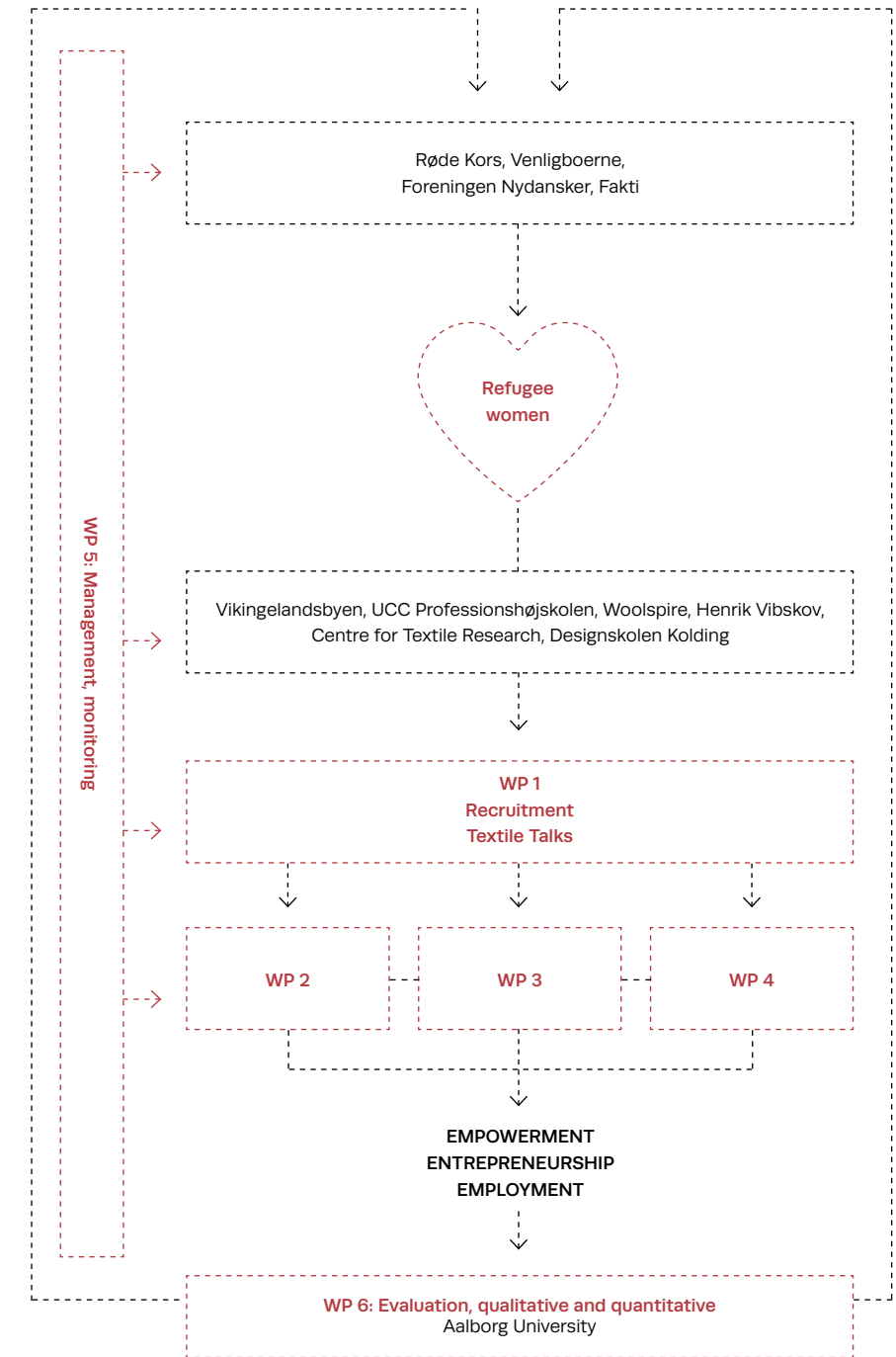
The three key aims for the THREAD project were identified as empowerment, employment and entrepreneurship. These were to be achieved via a network based on shared interests in textile crafts and textile culture. The central idea was that THREAD as a themed model of integration would provide useful contacts for refugee women who had left their own network of supportive family, friends, neighbours and colleagues behind in their countries of origin. The intention was not that contact with the network alone would empower women, provide employment

or turn them into entrepreneurs. More modestly, it was hoped that these contacts would help stimulate empowerment, open doors to employment, and introduce the idea of entrepreneurship as a career option. The project was intended to investigate the feasibility of a transferable model of support for refugees based on networks formed around shared interests and suggest how other similar themed networks could aid refugee integration. One of the crucial aspects of THREAD was that all the main players were dress and textile specialists drawn from a wide range of organisations and individuals in the areas of fashion, design, art, archaeology, history, cultural heritage, language studies, terminology and teacher training. None had expertise in refugee issues and only one was a support agency with experience of working with immigrants to Denmark. The management team was largely made up of academics with high hopes of bridging the gap between academic research, design, craft and hobbyists and of making a difference in the field of integration, but with little practical experience of doing so. It was a conscious decision not to define each of the three main goals at the outset of the project but to explore what they could become given the resources and context in which the project was operating.

Refugees coming to Denmark in the past 30 years. Source: EARN project



THREAD model (CTR)





Auto-biographical embroidery from Tingbjerg

Diplomas awarded to designers after hijab workshop



In 2016, the Innovation Fund Denmark (IFD) identified integration as a key challenge for refugees and their host countries and called for a 'Grand Solution'. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)'s five commitments to women refugees (2001) encourage the meaningful participation and economic empowerment of women. The Centre for Textile Research (CTR) at the University of Copenhagen responded to this call with an innovative idea for welcoming and integrating women refugees which recognises the knowledge, skills and potential they bring.

Government statistics in 2016 showed that most refugees came from Syria and, although there were fewer women than men seeking asylum, their numbers were significant (just over 3,000 in 2015). Of these Syrian women, most were young, aged 20 to 29 years. Nearly 1,000 individuals in this age group arrived in 2015. Many women refugees seek to enter the labour market for the first time on arrival in their new country. There are older women too (approximately 500 women aged 40 to 50 years settled in Denmark in 2015), who were likely to have relevant transferable skills. Refugees rarely carry diplomas and documents proving their competences but nevertheless have knowledge, skills and capacities which are relevant for the Danish design, textiles and fashion industries. The THREAD network aimed to find ways of identifying refugees' textile-related capacities, encourage them to be creative, build their confidence and showcase their skills.

Textile talks

The THREAD partners set out to recruit a wide range of contacts from their existing networks to build a community committed to providing opportunities for refugee women. The project began as a diverse programme of weekly Textile Talks, which brought partners, collaborators and refugee participants together at a variety of venues in Copenhagen and further afield. These lively get-togethers offered an introduction to a specific craft (such as embroidery and knitting) or culture (such as wedding clothes and textile memories) with interesting insights into history and traditions followed by a hands-on session. After a year, Textile Techniques were added to the events programme to offer opportunities for attendees to explore a specific craft in depth. Organising these events not only brought THREAD to the attention of a wider number of people but also tested what times and which places were most successful in attracting participants.

One venue for Textile Talks was FAKTI (Foreningen for Flygtninge og Indvandrerkvinder), a migrant and refugee community organisation (MRCO) for women established in 2002. Its full-time staff specialise in helping very fragile women, including those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with a therapeutic garden, a knitting club and a sewing group. Their long-running programme shows how textiles, alongside gardening and food, serve as inspiring themes for sharing and exchange across different refugee cultures.

Henrik Vibskov textile workshop

Henrik Vibskov, Danish fashion designer and the creative power behind his international brand, hosted a project that experimented with an academic/commercial collaboration, an early empowerment exercise, and an exploration of the potential for modest fashion as a marketplace for refugees. *Hijab Me!* was inspired, in part, by refugees' comments that finding suitable fabric for hijabs was a challenge in Denmark. A Vibskov in-house designer led the week-long creative collaboration with women designing their own hijab fabric by printing or dyeing and decorating it. Four hijabs were displayed in an informal exhibition held at the company's outlet store and a professional photographer captured the refugee and migrant designers wearing their hijabs (see photos by Jes Saatterup). The event highlighted the fact that hijabs are contested garments but also demonstrated ways for enterprising women to exploit gaps in the fashion marketplace.



Design work at the Hijab workshop was exhibited at a small event and documented

CRAFTING A MODEL FOR INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE WOMEN THROUGH CRAFTS AND TEXTILES



ILLUSTRATION BY KØSCH, KATJA ØDER SCHLESINGER

Artwork describing the THREAD project and presented at the Women Deliver conference in Vancouver 2019 by Aalborg University. Illustration by KØSCH, Katja Øder Schlesinger, Design Anthropologist

THREAD's key players

The project partners and collaborators were drawn from academia, commercial companies, municipalities, public institutions, and refugee support agencies:

Centre for Textile Research, Copenhagen University (CTR) – an academic institution

Design School Kolding (DSK) – an academic institution

Bachelor of Textile Design, Handicraft and Communication University College Copenhagen UCC/KP – an academic institution

Global Refugee Studies, Aalborg University – an academic institution

Køge Community College – a municipal institution

Centre for Dansk & Integration, Ølby – a municipal institution
Kolding, Køge and Copenhagen local municipal authorities

Business Kolding – a business support agency

Kolding Kommune – a municipality

Erhvervshuset CPH – a business support agency

Viking Village, Albertslund – a visitor attraction

Workers Museum, Copenhagen – a visitor attraction

National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen – a visitor attraction

Design Vanilie & Igne:Oya – a design consultancy/Migrant & Refugee Community Organisation (MRCO)

TERMPPlus – a terminology consultancy

FAKTI – a Migrant & Refugee Community Organisation (MRCO)

Hack Your Future – a Migrant & Refugee Community Organisation (MRCO)

Novaheim – a Copenhagen Business School student enterprise

Syrian Cultural Institute – a Migrant & Refugee Community Organisation (MRCO)

Another View – a commercial company

Blanche – a commercial company

Edie – a commercial company

H&M – a commercial company

Henrik Vibskov – a commercial company

Lara et Anise, a commercial company (Toulon, France)

Mark Ken Domino Tan – a commercial company

Proem Parades – a commercial company

Storm & Marie – a commercial company

Woolspire – a commercial company

Danske Konferencehoteller – a marketing bureau

THREAD's key concepts

Empowerment has been recognised as one of the 'three pillars of poverty reduction' by the World Bank since 2000. In 2015, the United Nations identified achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls as the fifth of 17 Sustainable Development Goals. This makes women's empowerment a human rights target. THREAD's goals also aligned with recent recommendations for refugee resettlement programmes as promoted by the UNHCR, which has adopted community and participatory approaches. These see refugees as agents rather than subjects. The European Council on Refugees and Exiles argues that 'refugee empowerment is critical in refugee integration' and the mission of the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement states it is 'founded on the belief that newly arriving populations have inherent capabilities when given opportunities'. Empowering refugees to direct their own lives is now a fundamental part of refugee resettlement policy. An empowered person increases her own life options and choices, gains greater control over her life, and achieves the ability to live as she wishes to live. Empowerment is also a process by which those with less power gain greater control over their own lives to achieve specific goals, with emphasis on 'finding a voice' (the ability to make oneself heard and visible) and to have confidence in 'talking back'. Empowerment is therefore a dynamic process that involves negotiation and coordination.

Employment is considered the primary indicator and best evidence for refugee empowerment, integration, and self-sufficiency by the Danish government. The 1998 Integration Act identified labour market integration as an explicit goal for the first time. Since then, central and local government resources have been directed primarily towards encouraging (some would say, insisting) refugees to obtain paid, full-time work. The job centres and social workers who provide support for refugees therefore spend time, effort and other resources on traditional help for finding and securing full-time employment. This narrow focus of success in resettlement limits the scope of potential empowerment. It results in qualified people with skills and professional experience, who may be unable to provide



Interns visiting Designmuseum Danmark

documentation that was lost or destroyed in transit, being forced into precarious, low-skilled, entry-level positions. The Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration's report to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on international migration in Denmark (2017) shows that migrant women from 'non-western' backgrounds have the lowest rates of employment in the Danish labour market (46%), and are significantly behind the next two lowest groups: women descendants of 'non-western' immigrants (64%) and women immigrants of 'western' origin (64%).

A large proportion of women in the 'non-western immigrant' groups arrive as beneficiaries of the family reunification programme and therefore as dependent persons. The NGO Refugees Welcome DK suggests these statistics illustrate how difficult it is for women to enter the Danish labour market. However, research has shown that there is more subtlety to the situation. Women refugees and family reunified persons have a low employment rate in their first years of living in Denmark but tend to gain more than men do from the education and skills they acquired in their home country or education undertaken after arriving in Denmark, especially during the period eight to 15 years after their arrival. This suggests that there is a successful process at work, which can be accelerated. One way to achieve this is to stimulate social networks, which lead to a 'foot in the door' to employment and access to volunteering opportunities, which lead to more satisfying work and lives.

Entrepreneurship

Self-employment is a key opportunity for refugees, and women especially, because it offers flexibility to work around caring responsibilities and is often home-based. Refugees bring specific advantages to entrepreneurship because of their overseas connections, access to concentrated cultural consumer groups in the host country, and their experience of precarious situations in fleeing from danger. These are relevant to success because of the import and export potential for goods and services, strong personal connections to a specific market segment, and willingness to take risks, which is a recognised attribute of successful entrepreneurs. Studies

have shown that diversity and immigration bring strategic assets, which help businesses cope better with rapidly changing local conditions and the global economy. The success of immigrants' entrepreneurial ventures is largely due to the social capital they are able to 'conjure' both individually and as families. Their own social networks are considered valuable assets, which provide access to power, information, knowledge and capital leading to stronger business relationships and increased trade. Many entrepreneurial ventures established by refugees take advantage of their extended family's capacity for 'bootstrapping' (pulling together to work hard, pool



Textile Talk about wardrobe studies at CTR



resources and withstand hard times). This may be shared by only a few people but with strong ties, which make their common vision of 'one way ahead' very resilient. Refugees also see establishing a business as a way to forge a new identity, seize opportunities and steward cultural capital (especially if the business serves a need for goods from the country of origin or provides a traditional service not available in the host country). Studies have shown that it is advantageous for host countries to have a good percentage of refugees become self-employed. Any efforts made to boost refugee entrepreneurial start-ups may well yield long-term sustainable benefits.

WHAT DID THREAD PROMISE?

THREAD targets

- Empowerment – 100 participants
- Employment activation – 60 participants (work experience or education)
- Employment – 25 participants
- Entrepreneurs – 16 participants build an idea that leads to self-employment within six months of the project's completion
- Value and impact on society (2016 figures)

A woman who spends her adult life dependent on social benefits from the state receives on average 7 million DKK

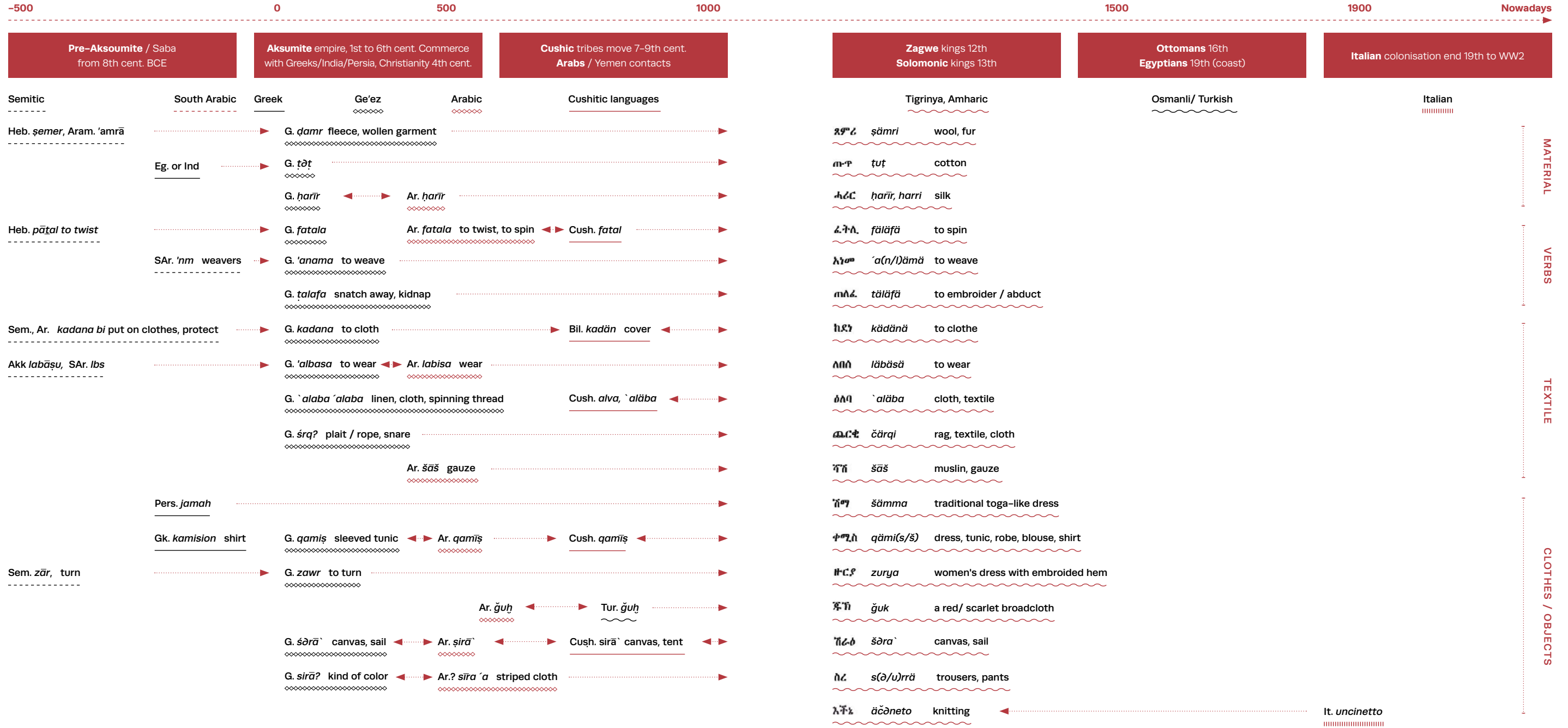
A woman who spends her adult life in full-time employment (at the lowest educational level) earns 13.5 million DKK

If 25% of the THREAD participants enter full-time work permanently, the impact is at least 337 million DKK, plus the effects of the multiplier.

If 60% of the THREAD participants enter full-time work permanently, it is 810 million DKK plus the effects of the multiplier.

Consequently, for an IFD investment of 50,000 DKK per refugee, each woman has the potential to transform her life from one of dependence and difficulty to one of independence and inspiration.

Some Tigrinya textile/ clothing words and their influences





Getting crochet hair bands ready for sale at Fenuun

DEFINE

Some of THREAD's strategies for establishing and growing a textile-themed network were to run weekly textile craft workshops, offer internships, and undertake wardrobe, textile, and terminology studies.

Textile workshops

Several different THREAD workshop formats were trialled during the first year of the project. Timings for events such as these are crucial because refugees (and especially women) have a tight programme of mandatory activities required by the local authorities and family responsibilities such as collecting children from school and taking elderly relatives to health services. Venues for events must be accessible for refugees who lack personal transport and/or money for public services. Travelling long distances to attend network events cuts into what is already a short day for many women. Regular events at the same venue are essential for building up expectation and delivering a consistently beneficial experience for refugees. Early evening events are often more convenient for women with caring responsibilities. Husbands who work regular hours can take over childcare or children can accompany their mothers to craft-based activities after school. Recruiting enough volunteer translators (or financing professionals) with the appropriate language skills is key to the success of recruitment to the events. However, once the textile activities are underway translation is not so necessary, as the craftwork transcends language barriers.

The late afternoon/early evening workshop format proved to be the best way to attract and engage many women refugees. Igne:Oya held 315 workshops in total in Tingbjerg, Husum, Farum and Bellahøj and two Copenhagen museums. Igne:Oya participants also produced three fashion shows with a large local audience that rose to 190 guests at the most recent event. There were 50 Fenuun workshops, which focused on refugee women's motivation and self-confidence and coached them to design high quality textile products. These workshops were held at the Design School Kolding, right across the street from the local language school, which made them convenient and accessible to participants.

Each workshop programme also attracted a number of local Danes and other immigrants who were crucial ambassadors for THREAD's aims. The relationships formed between people of different cultures were important outcomes from these events.

Another format was craft workshops held in connection with Danish language classes, such as the series of workshops at the Ølby Center for Danish and Integration (a Danish language school), where THREAD partners hosted 13 textile craft workshops between Danish language classes several times a week. They were held in a central concourse of the college where the number of students passing by was high. Danish language teachers reported a surprising outcome: there was increased learning and improved concentration among those students who participated in the textile craft workshops.

Internships

The internships played a central role in the project's development. The Viking Village in Albertslund, design company Henrik Vibskov, CTR, UCC/KP and DSK all hosted interns after finding ways to navigate the official system requiring specific obligations of refugees (for example, attending Danish classes).

Planning and hosting internships served as reality checks for the project partners as they were the first points of real contact between THREAD and the Danish system for supporting refugees. One of the crucial problems was the complexity and multiplicity of regulations for any integration programme. THREAD partners all reported difficulties in navigating their way to and through various stakeholders with very different agendas. There is a lack of transparency and consistency in the system. In some ways, the need to problem-solve in order to find a productive way of working with the local authority became a driver for continuous development of activities in the project.

Learning to navigate the bureaucracy was a significant development in the project. It is noteworthy that eventually knocking on the right door in Kolding's social services department was a





Wardrobe study in Kolding

lucky break leading to progress, which had not been possible in Copenhagen. The geographical concentration of the local authority offices, the language school and DSK in Kolding was a significant factor in the success of the activities hosted there. The fact that refugee participants did not have to go out of their way to attend activities at DSK made it a much more comfortable prospect that if they had needed to travel to a new part of town.

The internships spanned a wide variety of opportunities from specific training in textile-related skills such as silk-screen printing for a few hours at UCC/KP to an ongoing regular commitment to two days a week helping to run activities for schoolchildren at the Viking Village. Three interns spent three days a week for three months at CTR together with two almost full-time paid interns (both qualified archaeologists) who played substantial roles in THREAD, one of whom is still on the Basic Integration Training Programme (IGU) scheme.

The internships – 25 in total – all proved to be a significant learning experience for both the interns and the host organisations. Some interns overcame severe difficulties and anxieties, some obtained subsequent full employment, and

others experienced significant personal development. The “mini-jobs” at DSK laid the groundwork for Fenuun and later the Vielgut Studio. Many of the women recruited as interns became important THREAD networkers themselves.

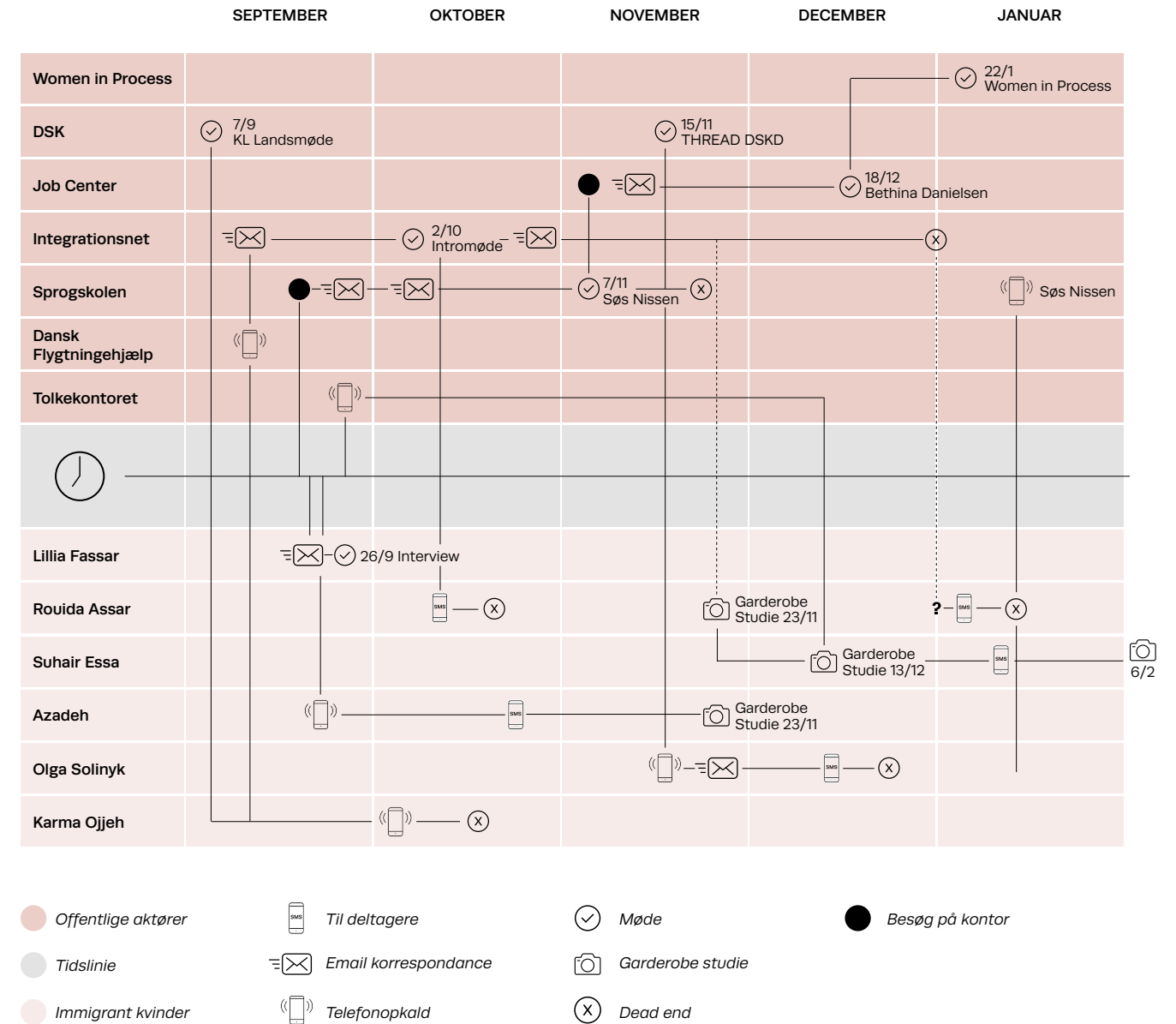
Wardrobe studies

A series of wardrobe studies were undertaken with eight refugee and migrant women, in order to shed light on the way in which “modest fashion” is played out and practiced in Denmark. Documenting the personal collections of dress objects stored by immigrant women showed how incomers try to manage their own integration process through what they wear and do not wear. It demonstrates the literal integration of dress as they negotiate relationships between clothing and values they brought from their countries of origin with the clothing and values they encounter after arrival in Denmark.

The wardrobe biographies of these women are key to understanding journeys of immigration in which dress connects past, present and future and expresses the memories, dreams and aspirations of individuals. The sample was chosen to include a wide range of ages, countries of origin, and years lived in Denmark. The exemplary sample of eight women represented three of the larger groups of immigrants in Kolding: Somalis and Afghans, who immigrated approximately 20+ years ago; and Syrians who had recently arrived in Kolding due to the current civil war and had lived in Denmark approximately two years at the time of the study.

The study revealed that the women brought very little in the way of clothing from their countries of origin but what they retain are their notions of beauty, styling and how to combine colours, materials, dress shape versus body shape, and conventions about appropriateness. As such, their present dress practice and what they currently own is not so much about physical objects, but about cultural ideas of beauty. There were similarities across the group in their preferences for strong, bright colours and sparkle, glitter and decoration but there were differences when it came to styling and combining.

Roadmap for contact with local authorities in Kolding





Fashion show at qq

Textile Terminology

Three refugees were recruited to internships at CTR for a three-month programme of scheduled activities twice a week with one of the THREAD partner organisations and a local volunteer from CTR's network. They began a mapping exercise using a previous project exploring Arabic words for loom technology in Jordan as a starting point. Two of the interns spoke Tigrinya as their mother tongue and, having learnt to knit during their first few days with THREAD, worked to build up relevant Tigrinya terminology for knitting. This project continued very successfully, with the interns inviting the researchers to social evenings and restaurants where other Tigrinya speakers meet to discuss the textile terms in more detail. The project produced schematic representations of the linguistic findings, which were presented at conferences and published as academic papers, with attribution for the interns' work. There has been interest in this model of working from other scholars working on terminology. This experiment provides a good illustration of how THREAD is characterised by two-way learning between scholars and refugee women.

Novaheim

THREAD's collaboration with a student enterprise set up at the Copenhagen Business School demonstrated that "empowerment" was, for some refugee women, a premature aspiration. The Novaheim team established workshops with refugees living at the Avnstrup Asylum Centre 50km west of Copenhagen, where they taught the participants Tunisian crochet and produced craft items for sale. As asylum seekers cannot legally work in Denmark, the women were "paid" with days out to experience life outside the camp and learn about Denmark and Danish culture.

The most successful excursion was a trip to Egeskov Castle Christmas market at which the women saw their products sell out. They also experienced a traditional Danish cultural event. Novaheim's experience provided useful insights into the women's readiness to envisage a new future for themselves. Novaheim's directors reported that most of the women, with whom they worked twice a week for more than a year, needed



"enlightenment" before "empowerment". They lacked the capacity to envision a better future, and needed to first see the simple possibility of there being one. This led to THREAD adopting a greater emphasis on the therapeutic benefits of simple participation in craft-based activities than had been previously anticipated. Unfortunately the Novaheim project was brought to an abrupt halt when the Danish government announced the transfer of the asylum seekers from Avnstrup to another centre on the island of Bornholm, 180 km away from Copenhagen with few easy and affordable transport links, making it impossible for Novaheim to continue their work.

This experience served as a useful reminder that refugees' lives are precarious even when they have fled from immediate danger and that decision-making by politicians and administrators can have a profound impact on their lives.



Designer Stine Linnemann and Trine Lindegaard's collaborative weaving project Væv NV sammen/Weaving North-Western Copenhagen Together, June 2017

DEVELOP

An important challenge for THREAD was to discover and develop the competences and capacities refugee women offer Danish society. Another was to encourage them towards entrepreneurial experiences, which lead to self-employment and job creation – targets which lay at the core of the THREAD project.

Three closely connected THREAD projects investigated and tested ways of transferring textile skills into jobs. They each illustrate well how this process requires close and constant hand-holding to nurture individual women, together with a great deal of perseverance and patience on the part of the project leaders, especially in their interaction with officials working under Danish integration and employment policies. There is a need for project leaders to 'disrupt' the system to find loopholes through which refugees with entrepreneurial skills can find a place in the job market.

What these projects also illustrate is that there are no easy solutions and that the transition from newly-arrived refugee to active employee takes a great deal of time and effort. However, it also shows that the potential for refugee women to visualise themselves as entrepreneurs and work towards achieving that vision is realistic and worth the effort.

Fenuun and VielGut Studio

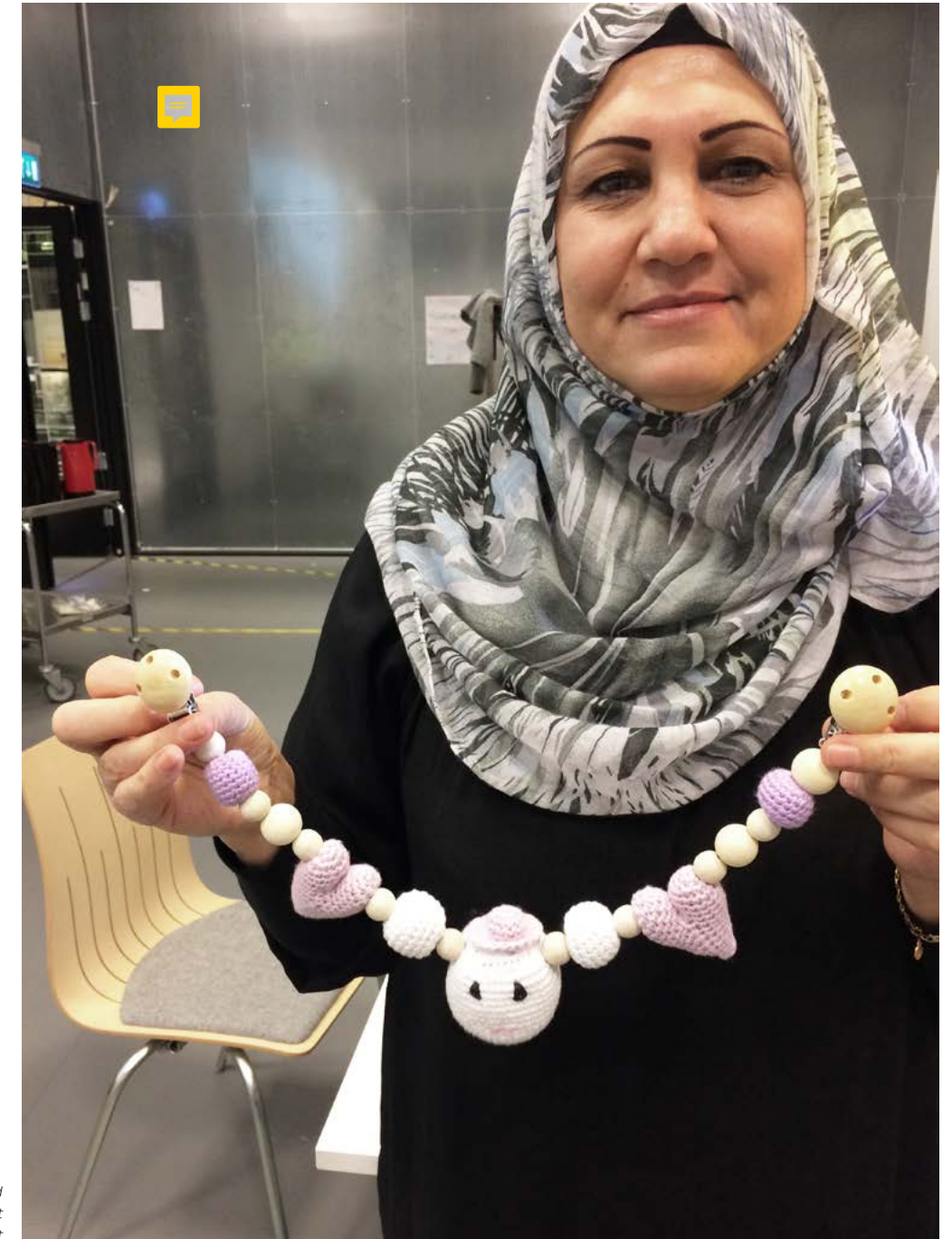
Fenuun was a weekly textile workshop held in DSK in the centre of Kolding. It grew from the experience of hosting eight interns at DSK. The interns named the activity programme Fenuun, which means handicraft in Arabic. The workshops were held one afternoon each week from spring 2018 to June 2019 from 4pm to 7pm. Between five and 25 women came to each meeting depending on the activities that took place. A key purpose of Fenuun was to map the range of competencies and the level of textile skills for each refugee participant, and, on that basis, to upgrade these skills in various ways and document them in individual portfolios, which could be used for seeking internships or paid jobs. Fenuun participants contributed to a number of entrepreneurial activities, including sales in the DSK shop (to

a value of 8,900 DKK) and in collaborations with commercial companies, such as H&M Sustainability. This collaboration involved making materials to build H&M's Conscious Escape venue at the Heartland Festival in May/June 2019 from upcycled denim. A total of 32 refugee participants worked 286 hours for which they were each paid 138 DKK per hour (39,000 DKK). Finally, Fenuun participants created embroidery for a capsule collection for DK fashion brand Storm & Marie pay 138 DKK per hour.

VielGut Studio is Denmark's first pop-up shop run as a social enterprise showcasing eight local social enterprises committed to supporting disadvantaged people in Kolding. It was tested throughout December 2018 on the main pedestrian street in the inner city. The shop attracted a great deal of attention from citizens and politicians, as well as coverage by the media. Design students from DSK produced the shop's interior but Fenuun participants were in charge of organising their own sales booths and making sure there were always filled with products for sale, as well as actually selling them to customers. The total value of sales from the Vielgut Studio was 15,000 DKK.

The unique and innovative achievement of Fenuun and VielGut Studio was that these projects formally recognised and systematically documented the skills of the participants in three categories. 'Creators' are confident and competent with design ideas; 'makers' are competent and capable with production; and 'starters' are keen to learn techniques and contribute to the team's goals. These generic categories enabled appropriate support for each of the participants – often within the group. This categorisation is transferable to other activities, such as food, gardening or sport – all potential themes for other social networks aiming to support refugees.

The projects also provided a forum for refugee participants to test the market for products they made and to assess and fix prices. This raised their awareness of market positioning, including product design. Items were adjusted in terms of their colour, materials and style to appeal to specific target



A crocheted baby mobile developed for the picky designer customers at the DSK Christmas Market



Preparing for Design School Kolding Christmas Market (top) and decoration for H&M venue at Heartland Festival (below)



Ready for sale! Crochet hair band with FENUUN price sticker



groups. Achieving these design refinements required significant emotional labour on the part of the workshop leaders. Mentoring and design consultancy took place via social media, often intensively and at all hours of the day and night, as the product development took place in the private homes of participants when they had time to work on them.

The practical challenges of providing a marketplace for products designed and made by refugees required innovative solutions. There were significant legislative and tax-related barriers to overcome for refugee participants in receipt of social benefit payments to undertake these entrepreneurial activities. Government policy and local enforcement of the rules were significant obstacles to THREAD's ambitions. The fact that the Danish welfare system is not set up to encourage self-employment or part-time activities as a way of integrating refugees or unemployed Danes into the labour market is a significant block on potential market growth and job creation.

One of the most important outcomes was a recognition of how difficult it is to establish social enterprises, which link to the formal economy. THREAD's textile workshops are struggling to find ways for the refugees' existing or newly acquired textile skills to work towards integration through self-employment. This transition requires a professionalisation process to make it possible to leverage the transition from home production to freelance work or employment.

THREAD has highlighted the lack of consensus in the current integration system on how to manage entrepreneurial activities so that people in receipt of welfare payments can sell their own products. Even though the solution of paying an hourly rate of 138 DKK was negotiated with several stakeholders and relevant unions, the necessary bureaucratic processes were so complicated that they demotivated the refugee women participants, integration workers in the local authority, and THREAD partners to the point of threatening the continuation of the entire project. Despite these difficulties, refugee participants in THREAD found the experience of selling products to Danes

was a source of motivation and pride. It inspired them to feel jobs were within their grasp and, in some cases, provided paid work for them.

Beyond the economic considerations, the textile workshops proved effective as safe spaces for refugee women who may hesitate to visit venues or join communities which are unfamiliar or hard to understand without a personal invitation. Textile-based activities are great opportunities for easy exchanges over fashion and textile production. This is termed “the shared third” – a medium for sharing not only design activities but also personal experiences of family, lifecycle and household activities, which often require very little language, especially when textiles provide tactile illustrations of children growing, traditions changing and memories being safeguarded. Furthermore, textile workshops reshape social hierarchies: the most skilled women became role models and drivers of improvement for other refugee participants. This phenomenon was echoed at FAKTI, Design Vanille/Igne:Oya, Novaheim and at ‘I Tråd med Verden’, which are all social enterprises based around textiles with proven track records.

Creating the digital THREAD with Hack your Future

THREAD collaborated with a number of well-established projects run by refugee and migrant community organisations (MRCOs) including Hack Your Future, a non-profit scheme to teach, upgrade and formalise the web development skills of young refugees and migrants. They offer a modular course on software for coding websites, taught on Sundays by volunteers from the IT industry. Course participants work in teams on project-based assignments, which become their personal portfolios for job applications.

The THREAD community began as an informal, organic network, which expanded and contracted as ideas coalesced and disappeared. It was recognised that the network might develop in new ways in the future as legacy projects were established and that the original stakeholders might be lost. A plan for an online platform to capture the current network was devised with the aim of eventually offering a forum for textile-related

organisations to offer opportunities for refugees and for refugees to offer their textile-related services. This was the perfect vehicle for THREAD to collaborate with Hack Your Future.

THREAD's prototype online platform became a portfolio exam project for Hack Your Future students, some of whom were refugee women. Prototyping is a well-known innovation tool in design and engineering. Its purpose is to gather complex information into tactile or interactive test products (physical or virtual) which are then refined and finalised. THREAD's current online platform is a prototype which pulls together activities, partners, ideas and findings which can then be passed on to a legacy project with new funding such as a local authority or social enterprise which can take advantage of its development opportunities.

FACT BOX

- Fenuun refugee and migrant participants collaborated with H&M Sustainability and built H&M's Conscious Escape venue from upcycled denim. They also worked on embroidery for a limited-edition collection made by Danish fashion brand Storm & Marie, and worked with DK fashion brand Mark Ken Domino Tan (in two embroidery workshops)
- Women from Igne:Oya now make prototypes for the Danish fashion brand Proem Parades and accessories for fashion shops Edie (Copenhagen) and Lara et Anise (Toulon, France)
- Entrepreneurship workshops held at Fenuun and Igne:Oya equipped 39 participants with advice on how to establish a start-up business in Denmark
- Fenuun has estimated the total sum earned during the project period to be approximately 60,000 DKK

Coding workshop with refugees and migrants at Hack Your Future





VielGut pop-up shop (left) and DSK Christmas Market (right)



Debating product development and design at the Fenuun workshop





Knitting project with design company Proem Parades in Tingbjerg

DELIVER

An important insight early on in the THREAD project was that many refugees were vulnerable and far from empowered. Their experiences of flight from danger and conflict and in transit to Denmark have left them lacking in self-confidence, imagination and, in many cases, traumatised. These refugees need to see that a different future is possible and that their lives can improve; they need to experience opportunities. Achieving this understanding has been called 'enlightenment' and it is a necessary process before they can feel empowered. Craft activities provide opportunities for this enlightenment through the acquisition of a new skill or personal confidence through creativity. A second important realisation was that some refugees' enlightenment leads them to education rather than directly to employment.

As a grand finale in 2019, THREAD was presented to the global community at the conference Women Deliver in Vancouver, Canada by partner Aalborg University.

Legacy projects

Three initiatives continue as legacy projects from THREAD. They are meaningful communities with room for all – from those learning a craft for the first time to experienced crafters. At whatever level they begin, all stand to gain confidence and the ambition to start something that can become a productive thread in their lives. Some have gained self-confidence and some are well along the path to employment or self-employment.

The Igne:Oya craft group in Tingbjerg hosts weekly open workshops with free activities and the opportunity for those who attend to produce and sell their own designs. They also take their products to other markets and pop-up shops. Igne:Oya participants continue to build collaborative partnerships with fashion brands and retail outlets in Copenhagen. Radiometer, the commercial sponsor of Igne:Oya (22,000 DKK), hosted an in-house Christmas Market in December 2019 at which staff were able to buy handmade products from Igne:Oya participants. Via the THREAD partnership, the women who belong to Igne:Oya have now formed a non-profit association, Made in Tingbjerg,

directed by a committee of participants who approved the association's constitution in 2019. Their ambitions are to use the association to brand their annual fashion shows and to undertake more collaborative artistic work with Tingbjerg Church. The craft expertise in Tingbjerg is being disseminated and scaled up through AOF (Arbejdernes Oplysningsforbund, the Workers' Educational Organisation),

Workshop about future dreams and aspirations at Fenuun





Donated fabric at the SheWorks studio in Kolding. Photo from SHEworks instagram @sheworks_official

as an outcome of THREAD. Building on their experiences of running workshops at two Copenhagen museums, participants are offering courses in ethnic craft traditions, providing an opportunity for them to teach and share, maintain traditional craft knowledge, and celebrate their own skills.

The Fenuun workshops were successful enough to inspire and consolidate two new enterprises in Kolding, supported by the local authority: the pop-up shop Vielgut Studio and SheWorks, both good examples of social innovation and entrepreneurship. In Vielgut Studio, original craft products are available to purchase and new designs are made by people on the margins of the labour market. Purchases support integration and social inclusion. Vielgut Studio won an innovation award of 100,000 DKK from Fynske Bank in 2019. At SheWorks, women join forces to create new designs for special occasions and earn a living in addition to, or instead of, receiving social benefits. It is a creative hub collaborating with designers and companies to test designs and techniques, and to create prototypes for the Danish fashion and textile industry. SheWorks is a social enterprise supported with 160,000 DKK from the local authority in Kolding. It is led by Solveig Søndergaard, initiator of Fenuun, research assistant in THREAD and designer.

A collaborative project with Hack Your Future produced a snapshot of the key players in the THREAD network as a website. This showcases some of the opportunities THREAD participants were able to take advantage of and promotes organisations and individuals who offer positive support to refugees. It is hoped that a legacy project from THREAD will be able to take over the website to keep it current and reflect the ongoing successes of the project. It was envisaged as a portal where refugees with skills and creativity to offer can showcase themselves and organisations seeking freelance workers or employees can find them. Educational establishments and commercial companies with courses and/or internship and work experience opportunities can also publicise these on the platform.

Textile terminology

The THREAD research which best demonstrated two-way learning between scholars and refugee women was the Tigrinya textile terminology project. New ways of working with languages were developed: sharing images of textile implements, textile techniques and garments; joining textile craft workshops with participants; and recording the pronunciation of words. There is now much interest in this way of co-creating research from the scholarly community. It is an innovative way of working which deserves more experimentation and investigation and has the potential to be included in new university teaching programmes, as well as generating new empirical data and methodologies. There is also scope to rethink engagement with citizens, university teaching programmes and new research projects, as this new approach facilitates access to previously inaccessible bodies of data and suggests a widening of the theoretical foundation of oral history and specialised terminological work.

Culture brokers, gatekeepers and key workers

A key finding is that social innovation in the field of integration is facilitated by culture brokers and gatekeepers. Culture brokers are transition agents with double or triple identities, with a migrant, refugee or simply non-Danish background, who are also engaged in Danish society and institutions. Those with hyphenated identities (e.g., Danish-Turkish) can move more freely between the different groups with a higher credibility. Gatekeepers are also key people. They have deep knowledge and sometimes exclusive access to certain groups of refugee and migrant people, which they also often represent. Gatekeepers are workshop facilitators, association chairpersons, or representatives of a minority group. Sometimes gatekeepers shut their gates to protect the participants from outside threats; sometimes gatekeepers push open the gates and invite the participants to go out into the wider community. They often facilitate their safe exit by accompanying them into new experiences and places. The bydelismødre are examples of highly successful gatekeepers. Some culture brokers from the host community in the THREAD project were willing to introduce

their friends, family and other contacts to the network and use their personal influence to create opportunities for refugee participants. Gatekeepers, key workers and cultural brokers take considerable risk and invest enormous emotional labour in order to achieve results. They are the drivers of social innovation and should be acknowledged and rewarded accordingly.

THREAD beyond Denmark

Your wardrobe mirrors who you are, who you were, and who you want to become. Forced migration means leaving everything behind and carrying your life in a suitcase. Clothing from the homeland therefore becomes a cherished memory and a thread to the past. In Textile Talks, in craft workshops, and during internships, clothing was often used as the inspiration for storytelling about women's lives and family histories. This emotional aspect of THREAD continues from 2019 to 2023 via a new European project with partners in Greece and Germany, working with emotions, memories and clothing. In the *Fabric of My Life* project, oral textile and dress stories are recorded in podcasts in multiple languages and made available on an online platform. Textile artists are also co-creating exhibitions with refugee and migrant women. The legacy project is funded by Creative Europe (€187,000). As mentioned, in 2019, THREAD was presented at the Women Deliver conference in Vancouver, Canada.

Co-creating academic research and new methodologies

A feature of many of the initiatives in THREAD was successful co-creation between host communities and refugee participants. In the academic projects (Textile Terminology and Wardrobe Studies), as well as in the textile workshops, two-way learning between scholars and refugee women has clearly demonstrated its potential and yielded highly interesting academic results. Textile and dress terminology research is currently an expanding international, interdisciplinary research field. However, focus has been on languages of the industrial countries, and on languages with established terminological research. THREAD aimed to be a pioneer in accessing languages and dialects, which are understudied in a western context, difficult to access, or lacking

specialised vocabularies. Wardrobe studies demonstrated the value of oral history and personal narrative as research methodologies. The design development of 'modest fashion' products between trained Danish fashion designers and refugee women contributed to research in design and co-creation.

Evidence of integration for vulnerable women

Two key findings in THREAD were the extent to which employment is perceived as the primary indicator and official measure of successful integration and how inappropriate that is for some refugees. Some of the women who participated in THREAD suffer from mental and/or physical health problems as a result of their experiences. It is estimated that this group represents about one fifth of the participants, and is a particularly vulnerable group in which many are very far from the labour market. They need special support which is different from that currently offered by local authorities. The current social benefit rules do not fit well with these women's needs or capacities. They need hand-held and tailor-made help, kindness and care to establish trust, and require regular activities with flexibility for individual requirements. THREAD's focus on empowerment has proved successful, especially when the women were freed from formal expectations, obligations and penalties. For this group of women, other criteria than success in the labour market should be established. They can contribute to Danish society by providing better functioning family life, by becoming a resource and support for children and grandchildren, reduce their reliance on medication, achieve lower mortality rates, become a living memory of the lost homeland, and stand as guardians of family histories and ancient traditions.

WHAT DID THREAD DELIVER?

(see also Table of THREAD outcomes)

THREAD targets and achievements

· **Empowerment** – target 100 participants; 600+ participants achieved

· **Employment activation*** – target 60 participants; 36 achieved (25 internships, 5 portfolios, 2 education and 4 work placements)

**Local authority rules made achieving full-time and part-time employment very difficult within the constraints of THREAD. Efforts were shifted to self-employment early on in the project*

· **Employment** – target 25 participants; 32 achieved (through paid part-time freelance work on Fenuu commercial projects)

· **Entrepreneurs** – target 16 participants build an idea that leads to self-employment; 17 achieved (through individual entrepreneurial activities with fashion brands and outlets; plus 40 attendees at entrepreneurship workshops)

· **Value and impact on society** (2016 figures)
– A woman who spends her adult life dependent on social benefits from the state receives on average 7 million DKK.

– A woman who spends her adult life in permanent full-time employment (at the lowest educational level) earns 13.5 million DKK

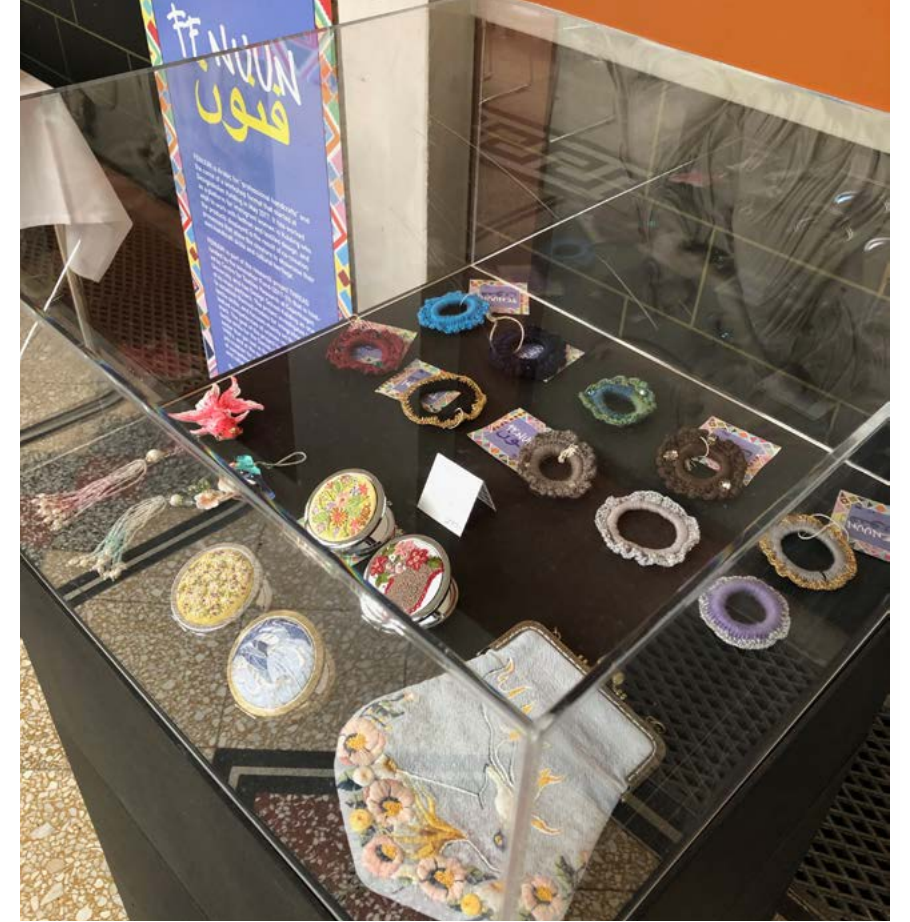
– Thus, if only one THREAD participant leaves dependence on social benefits and gains permanent full-time employment (at the lowest educational level), the IFD investment of 4.8 million DKK becomes full value for money

Woman working at the SheWorks Studio in Kolding. Photo from SHEworks instagram @sheworks_official





Women working at the SheWorks Studio in Kolding.
Photo from SHEworks instagram @sheworks_official
(All photos on this page)



Exhibition of Fenuun products at a conference in Copenhagen in May 2019

CONCLUSION: THE THREAD TOOLKIT

Identify and activate the community which shares your passion

The core team in THREAD invited anyone and everyone from a wide community of friends, family, colleagues and other contacts with a passion for textiles to join THREAD. Expect enormous goodwill and be open-minded about which people and organisations will offer practical ideas and act on them. Push on the open doors in the network and leave the closed ones behind.

Investigate official policies and the application of regulations

Integration is marked by high complexity, multiple regulations, and fast-changing and unstable systems in Denmark. All THREAD partners reported the lack of transparency in the field. There are obstacles when joining official networks and trying to establish contact with key persons is hard work. There are difficulties accessing the necessary information. Different local authorities interpret and apply the rules differently with real impact on the lives, requirements and social benefits of refugee participants.

Be flexible

Social work in integration is marked by a high degree of change and unpredictable decisions in terms of staff, spaces, funding, and planning. The diversity of stakeholders, public, private, organisational, governmental and individual, increases the complexity. The landscape is characterised by many moving targets. Social enterprises in integration should be seen as start-ups with high-risk investment (in energy, effort time and/or money) leading to potential high gains and long-term payoffs.

Stay local and keep close to home

Most refugees are learning how to navigate their new country at many levels during the integration process. There are many practical and logistical obstacles to making and maintaining contact with potential participants. Using the same venues at regular times, keeping travelling distances short, and offering assistance to overcome unfamiliar routes and places establishes a routine and rapport with the participants which helps them feel comfortable.

Recruit and value the culture brokers, the gatekeepers and the key workers

The bi-nationals, second generation migrants, and people with hyphenated identities (such as Danish-Turkish) are crucial to recruitment, credibility and communication with refugees and migrants. Foster relationships with the influencers in the refugee community and recognise the risks they take in opening doors. Specific individuals from the host community are willing to tap into their own networks to provide opportunities for refugees. These three groups of drivers should be recognised as influencers and given credit for their knowledge and emotional labour.

Focus on non-verbal communication and speak the host language

The language barriers are there. But most participants help each other to translate and understand. Speaking the host language during textile activities helped the participants grow their confidence as they used what they learned in Danish classes. Their week-by-week progress in language proficiency was noticeable. During internships, body language, humour, drawings and pictures helped communication to work well.

Plan social activities to document skills and open doors to internship opportunities

The majority of THREAD's refugee participants are without much formal education. Social activities and internships seem to meet their needs best. THREAD has demonstrated that the social activities can be structured to provide formal evidence of the textile skills of individuals too. This can be used to open doors to internships and other professional opportunities.

Showcase participants' skills

The majority of THREAD participants are without formal documentation for their skills. Professional screenings made by the authorities overlook women's capacities and skills in craft, as they are not knowledgeable about the fashion and textile job market in Denmark. Portfolios demonstrating participants' achievements facilitated by design professionals helped to document such skills and are recognised as evidence to help acquire paid work in this field.

Create space for two-way learning

Refugee participants provide valuable lessons for the host community participants. They bring knowledge, experience and understanding, which is different from the norm but it takes time for them to want to share. Diversity is enriching. New perspectives often give rise to innovative ideas and creativity. Ensure the social activities of the network allow for exchange in both directions from the beginning. Design a space for two-ways learning.

Expect to expend emotional labour

Internships must be tailor-made and hand-held, and ideally, each intern has a supervisor, who can help with navigating the rules and the paperwork, and one or two mentors, who can engage in co-creative work, help with planning activities and solve social and logistical problems. This method is demanding in terms of resources, time, and personal energy. Internships need to provide physical comfort, emotional wellbeing and instil confidence. Sharing life stories as well as the more obvious introduction to a workplace culture are crucial to lifting participants' expectations from empowerment to a vision of further education or employment.

Be resilient

Social work and integration work are exhausting. Physically, because it requires constant mobility, agility, and work in inadequate spaces, in low quality environments without the comfort of other workplaces; mentally, because many participants are in difficult and frustrating situations. It is often driven by individual enthusiasts who are at risk of burning out. Supervision and support are necessary for these "caretakers" in order to maintain balance and resilience among the network.

Find ways of working together

In the field of social innovation, a flexible model of collaboration is necessary. Stakeholders and experts in the field of integration are extremely diverse: from huge international NGOs (such as the Red Cross), networks of volunteers (such as Venligboerne), municipalities, and private companies undertaking outsourced

integration work. THREAD added universities, professional education institutions and commercial companies. It is necessary for good working practices to evolve into well-functioning models for social innovation.

Establish meaningful criteria for success

Finding full-time, permanent employment is not realistic for many refugees and may not represent the best way for them to integrate into society in the host country. Consider and value other contributions which refugees can make to local society such as coaching and mentoring young people, supporting family life, encouraging healthier living, and caring for others. These outcomes may have far-reaching benefits for the individual in terms of playing a valued role in society but also for others who receive their support.

Focus on the long-term benefits

The financial gains of effective integration are significant in terms of the difference between a lifetime on social benefits and being self-employed or employed. The social gains of effective integration are significant, in terms of happiness, well-being, a sense of belonging, and good feelings, which are transmitted over generations and help to influence the degree of engagement in and commitment to society among refugee groups in the future.

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