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Competency building among refugee and immigrant women. An alternative model (THREAD)

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Conference theme: Critical perspectives on theories and practice related to the field of intercultural communication, competency development in education and workplace contexts

Abstract

This paper will discuss models for integrating refugee and immigrant women to the Danish labour market. Our presentation builds on our participation in an interdisciplinary research project THREAD, funded by the Danish Innovation Foundation. The aim of the research project is to create a model for integration through a common interest in textile and fashion. Danish researchers, practitioners and firms provide a new platform for the Refugee and immigrant women to meet. Through this platform, the women will strengthen their social network, gain economic independence and improve chances of entering the labour market. Additionally the model will inspire and support social entrepreneurship (Bornstein 2007) among the women. Keywords for the project is empowerment, employment and entrepreneurship.

The paper will discuss and challenge the ideas behind the research project and the results around the midterm evaluation. Empowerment (Friedmann 1992) is a key word when working with disadvantaged groups. It suggests creating competence, based on, among other things, intercultural communication. Including social entrepreneurship in the integration model points to a form of agency, which more mainstream integration models lack (Ager & Strang 2008). Through empowerment refugee and immigrant women gain agency to become social entrepreneurs. Ideally, social entrepreneurship will aid women to start their own businesses, thus avoiding stigmatization and negative discourse of oppressed and passive victims of a male dominated 'foreign culture, which is currently expressed, both among members of the press and among Danish politicians. The paper will focus on practice. We will discuss the different initiatives created within the research project, such as workshops, meeting activities, formulation of vision and mission and outreach to involve refugee and immigrant women. The core questions in the paper are:

How will the THREAD initiatives mobilize resources among participants (refugee and immigrant women, researchers and firms/organizations)? Is creativity a vector for integration and how can creativity empower?