

# COMING TO THE NORDICS



"My Inclusion Journey"  
A booklet of migrants'  
stories about their  
integration in the Nordics

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## Andrew Bende Civil Connections Daily Leader

We have for the past 1 year been implementing a project – “Coming to the Nordics”, a process through which we are proud to announce three incredibly humbling products to inspire anyone working within the migration, inclusion, and integration space. These products include:

A 30-episode “Coming to the Nordics” podcast giving listeners many months/years of engaging with inclusion.

A storybook formed out of the life stories of the different people/“migrants” we have had on the podcast.

An online course in podcasting for others to start podcasting and creating more life stories for inspiration.

(Find all the resources here: <https://civilconnections.org/coming-to-the-nordics/>)

The biggest lesson we have gained on this journey is the urge to reflect on the commonly desired state of integration, and what this really means vis-à-vis the structuring and daily negotiations of the lives of migrants especially in their early years of arrival in the Nordics. This exploration has convinced us that while we all desire to achieve integration as fast as possible, it may be more useful to focus and consequently redefine demands to newcomers towards inclusion, as this is really what we all desire to be met with, and which creates space for “a feeling at home and at peace” with our new societies and our roles in them – integration.



## Here is the full story:

A couple of years after my arrival in Denmark and actively engaging in the social fabric of the country, I remember the debate on integration coming to new heights. There suddenly started emerging more specified definitions of the term integration – this among others taking connotations of “speaking fair free Danish, being ‘well placed’ on the job market (with minimum income demands), and the question of social mobility to count as a Dane also coming with caveats of carrying original ethnic Danish traits, etc.”. And when one spoke the language with an accent there would be representations of not being well integrated.

I remember being part of uncountable discussions and debates about integration, and what in fairness would be achievable from a personal perspective, and integration’s relations to its other relatives like assimilation and inclusion. At that time, when someone talked about integration, I would tell them, no, it is not integration we need to talk about but rather inclusion. This was because the emerging definitions of integration made it difficult to be achievable by anyone not ethnically Danish. And if you went on with this, then it would be more beneficial for the debate if we outrightly called the theme assimilation.

Integration defined fairly is a lifetime journey that changes and is negotiated according to the context of the society and a specific moment in time, which makes it very fluid and too dynamic to make fair policy around. Examples of this fluidity from contemporary Denmark and Europe at large include changes to laws in the face

of shocks like the “the refugee crisis” that triggered new approaches to how we saw people entering our borders. The economic crisis at the start of the 2010s and its influences on the job market, and or the rise of right-wing nationalism witnessed across the 2000s, probably triggered by the other incidences, but that also defines new and stricter standards for integration.

All these events and ‘integration redefinition’ and policy demands, only attest to the fatigue that comes with maintaining a dedicated focus on an integration model that calls for assimilation, rather than inclusion and active participation in the lives of our communities. Taking this approach is very tiring for both those that define and set the standards, and those that need to keep adjusting their lives to fit the changing standards. But if we settle with inclusion, then this frees us and in real sense means that we also create the chance to change the view of things from expecting and forcing others to fit in, and instead work for creating spaces, opportunities, and to facilitating others to fit in.

So based on this line of thinking, we in the fall of 2020 initiated a project “Coming to the Nordics” that set out to delve into stories of migrants and to understand their everyday, their motivation to be part of the Nordic societies, their daily navigation, and commitments that we do not see in the bigger lines, their hidden contributions to these societies etc. And through these stories, then go back to ask our question if these are not striving for inclusion or not included already. And, if there is need at all to continue using the term integration on them where in real sense we are demanding for assimilation. This project is presented below.

## **Coming to the Nordics Project – setting high ambitions:**

Our project set out to contribute to a Nordic region that is tolerant to diversity and has supportive tools in inter-cultural citizenship for easier and quicker migrant inclusion and integration. This would be reached through facilitating more inter-cultural experiences, reflections, learning, awareness and hopefully curiosity, towards better spaces for social-cultural inclusion and harmonious/sustainable communities.

## **Specifically, the project set out and has achieved the following outputs:**

Developed 30 episodes in a podcast series we have named after the project “Coming to the Nordics”. This will give listeners many months and maybe years of engaging with inclusion. Here, we among others delved into their journey – reasons and the process of coming to the Nordics, life here – challenges, successes, contradictions, navigation of understanding, roles in their inclusion into the new societies, and advice they would give to other newcomers to ease their faster inclusion and settle-in.

We have developed the podcast into a storybook for these to be available for all interested to continue to interact with them for many years.

We have developed an online course in Podcasting that we know is relevant in getting beginners to start their podcasts. This gives opportunity for more untold stories to come to life.

The process and though behind the project design was also a major product. Particularly, the idea of combining storytelling, which is well known for providing easy access to bridging social-cultural gaps, with podcasting – a widely accessible and

acceptable technology of modern learning was a great idea. By this, the project has given us access to stories untold, and hopefully over the next many years facilitating more inter-cultural experiences, reflections, learning, awareness and hopefully curiosity, towards the migrants' cultural realities and shocks, as well as giving them the chance to reflect on their own role in their inclusion process.

Moreover, we have the belief that this is just a pioneer. We have seen across the project period that more and more migrants that would not come forward to narrate their lives, or call it rarely heard narratives of representatives of 8% of our local Nordic communities, have picked interest and courage to participate in the podcast. They want to contribute to local dialogue, reflections, debates, and policy formulation, purposely and meaningfully for diverse and sustainable local communities in their countries. They are seeking for inclusion.

## **The project's Nordic values:**

Our project products – the podcast, the course, and the story book have a longer term value to the Nordic region as opposed to other kinds of outputs that can be measured immediately. The intention with these products is to start a debate, and act as an all time present reminder and reference catalogue for that debate, towards making the Nordic region aware and always reminded of the huge opportunities with being diverse.

With the knowledge that, as the Nordic region receives new settlers from outside of its borders, the host countries and especially the local communities are social-culturally challenged, we hope that the projects products will be part of minimizing the negative collisions through setting up platforms for more efficient cultural learn-

ing, which is one of the central precursors in inclusion and integration work. By supporting migrants to reflect on their place in the Nordics, and their stories facilitating the native communities to understand how to work around or support their new members, we bring more value to the social coherence of the Nordic communities, and easing of inclusion attempts. Luckily, all the countries this project covers are open about the need for innovation around better inclusion efforts.

## **Podcasts themes and stories derived:**

This booklet's main purpose is to generate the contents of the project and the podcasts into readable stories of the participants' lives. Their purpose is to widen reference points for the ever ongoing #integration and #inclusion debate in our new homes - the Nordics. These people and stories are real - they come from #fathers, #mothers, #brothers, #sisters, #husbands, #wives, #children etc. These stories also come from some of the most dedicated people I know, people that wish the best for the #nordics and the #world at large.

Below are the selected stories that represent the main themes of our discussions.



## Carol Krostrup's Story

Carol is undoubtedly one of the most eye-catching names within the integration department of Helsinki Kommune found in northern Denmark, where she currently serves as the chairperson of the integration Council. Her role here is of advising politicians at the City Council on effective integration. In her bigger career backpack Carol has served as a member of the Danish Research Center for migration, ethnicity and health, a member of the Council for ethnic minorities in Denmark. Has represented Helsingør Kommune integration Council in the neighborhood safety collaboration group in Northern Sjælland. She has worked as project facilitator with the church international ministry for the wellbeing of refugees, was the delegate and leading advocate for girls and women's health rights at the women deliver conference in 2016.

Carol holds a master's degree in Public Health from Lund University in Swe-

den, as well as being a preacher of the gospel. On top of being a full-time job as a mother, it has also recently come to our attention that Carol will be running for a political representation in the local elections in Helsingør Kommune in 2021 under the Danish Conservative Party.

### ***What do your children think about running for politics?***

First, let me thank you for starting this podcast. It is very important to have all these different voices, giving insight into what it is like to come into the Nordic countries and the life in the Nordic countries when you have another ethnic background.

So, to my children and my politics, they were very excited when they heard that I would, that I wanted to run for the Danish conservative for care party. They were excited because they have seen my journey. They have seen who I am right from the time they were born. And they know that everything I have done has not come easy. And especially now because I am a single mother raising three children alone. So, when we talk about me wanting to run for the political party, it is there's a lot within it. It is not just as simple as me wanting to run there's been a story behind it and being a single mom and with all the challenges that brings with it being in a country other than my own original country. So, it's been layers of so many things and experiences. So, for them it is a victory when they see that I stepped to this place where I want my voice to be heard. Because there is so many other voices that need to be heard that I am representing. And so, in that way they cheer me on.

***Great. Carol we will come back to that later, but allow me to ask – how did you end up in Denmark? Or as we say why did you choose Denmark?***

Well, to be honest, I think the thoughts that were going across my mind were thoughts that every other young person has. I would say to see the world, to experience something new. I was in a place in my life, where I felt the same thing was happening again and again. And I just wanted to experience something new, I wanted to see the world. And so, then I got the opportunity. And the opportunity was Denmark, it could have been any other country. But it happened to be Denmark, there was a high school that I could apply, and come to. And then another thing about it was that the subjects the high school was presenting were very interesting, actually, for me, they really spoke to me. It was subjects like sustainable development, project management, human rights, theater of the oppressed, conflict management, all of this just really spoke to who I am as a person.

So, I saw it as an opportunity to come in and just develop this side of myself, but in a more relaxed atmosphere, because it was a high school. And a high school in Denmark is a kind of place where you're not going to be having exams, but you're going to just be studying, and really, you know, learning about a certain subject, but in a peaceful environment, where you also get to meet a lot of other people from all over the world. So, for me, it just sounded like a good thing at that time in my life in that age. The school was International People's College in Helsingør.

What were the immediate shocks, or surprises or experiences when you arrived? So of course, it was an international people's college – I kind of came into a bubble where we had people from all over the world. And so, it was very international, it

was all kinds of cultures, we were learning about different cultures. I did not immediately get into sort of the typical Danish culture. That's why I call it a bubble.

But of course, I did experience episodes that really came as a shock. And yeah, I will name a few of them. One of them was when I got in the train, and you looked around and every single person sitting in the train was white. And for a moment there, I think I got, you know, it's like, yes, I knew I was coming to a place where the most people being white, but maybe the shock of it hit me when I entered the train, and everyone was white. But then it sank in.

I think another thing was the sort of silence in the buses and in the trains. Because I was so used to that in Uganda, there's a lot of noise when you come to the bus station or when you're around the taxis, the public transport. There's always yelling and shouting, and the conductor is shouting so loud. So here I was, and it was so silence. Everybody was silent, and I think that was very, new for me. I could not understand how everybody could be so positively silent or, and really didn't know what to make of it.

And then I think another thing I also noticed, like very clearly was the cleanliness of everything.

And then the cold. I came around the time when it was just about to turn to winter. So that was also pretty a strong experience. I remember I kept buying gloves. And it didn't matter – my fingers were freezing until I ended up with the thickest gloves there ever was. I think it was these gloves that you use for when you go skiing or something.

So, many years down the road, and you're still here – how come:

So, what happened was beautiful, be-

cause when I came, I met a man, and that man ended up being my husband. And that was the most beautiful story. And we met at the high school, he was working there. And somehow then we got to know each other. And that led to us getting married. And then that meant I stayed. So that is how I ended up. But my original intention was not really to stay – I think mainly because of the language. I at that time thought it was a difficult language. So, I thought no, how could I survive here in terms of work vs. the language? But then love happened. And where there is love, there is a lot of possibilities. You can go through fire.

Comment: And, you know, that's one of the things we do not focus on in this integration debate. Commonly when we are talking integration, and or inclusion, we normally go for the policy, statistics, proof, etc., but very few will discuss the real human feelings, and connection. And I think this is something worth noting. And thank you for bringing it up

### ***How have you succeeded in getting into the Danish society?***

I appreciate that we are talking about this because you know, when I came, I really didn't see myself being able to learn the language for starters. But after I met this man, who then became my husband, I remember that I was like this desire to learn the language just suddenly came inside of me. I genuinely picked up an interest in the language that my roommate was teasing me. She said to me, I really don't understand you, Carol, you have been the same person saying that you don't like Danish, and it's so difficult, and you can't learn this language. And now I see you sitting down and really studying the language. So, she could not understand what the shift was suddenly. I was interested, because there was somebody who had come into my life,

that was very interesting for me. And I just wanted to learn his language.

Apart from the language there are all the other rules – work, being active in the society etc., but I think for me my focus the whole time was on the relationship that I had. So, the other part of it was never a burden. It was just a formality that we needed to get done to be/stay together. And my focus was on him, my focus was on our relationship, our life, our family, and just the love that we had together. The rest of it was just a part of the process in making sure that our family could be together, and so I just did what was necessary.

And for me, there is a difference between when you come to visit a place and deciding to stay in a place. When you choose to stay in a place you are no longer going to act like a guest, you now change your mind so that you begin to take up the values of that place. You want to participate in that place, you want to contribute, and it's coming genuinely. It is like if you come to my home, and you visit for a few days you will be treated as a guest, and I will not expect much from you. But the moment you say you're coming and moving in to live here, then I expect that you start to you know, to help with cleaning the house, make food sometimes, and be part of the family. And for me moving the Denmark and wanting to stay here was all being part of the family. I saw all the integration contract requirements as things that were necessary for me to do. So, I just kind of followed the rules that were there, and never thought of them as being a burden or a weight. So, we waited for several months for answers on whether I could stay, and then got the permit and then re-applied whenever we had to reapply – we just did it.

***What would you say society's role in helping you settle in was? Was there any role played?***

Or phrased another way – was it easier for you because society saw value in you, and would it be the same if that value was not as high as the social capital you had? I think this is a very relevant question – an important question, actually. Because first of all, I think there is different ways people have come into this country. And I am privileged to be one of those who came in and stayed because of love.

My story is a little bit – it sounds rosy, sounds easy, but there are others who came in as refugees or people escaping other places for their lives. I know this because I have worked with refugees as well, I've heard their stories, I have interviewed them. I know that some people's story is more rough and tough, they came because they were fleeing from a situation of insecurity, there is trauma involved in some of their journeys, and they're running away from some real danger. So, they come in, and of course, their whole process of learning the language and finding their way around is maybe more difficult, because they've already come to a traumatic journey. And their perception of what is being said can be translated differently. And maybe they don't have that extra energy to fully see through and understand if they are welcome here or not welcome.

But personally, I too, of course, was aware of what was going on, say in the media, like hearing the different things being written about foreigners. And this is one of the reasons why I began to pursue being in the integration Council, because there's been a lot of negative stories that are highlighted. And sometimes these stories end up making one feel, am I welcome, or am I not welcome here? But I just want to

stress and say that there is good in every place, and there is evil in every place. So, you have both the negative and the good. And this is where one really must be very careful to pay attention to the words being spoken. Or is it just people speaking from a point of view, where they don't know the story of the person who they are speaking about. So, in this way, I feel like I personally do not listen to all the negative things, I do not let them influence my life, my future, and how I choose to be. I choose to keep my heart open, and to want the best for everyone, and to participate in creating the best wherever I find myself.

Let me go a little bit into your work – when I read your resume you have done a lot of things in the integration area. You are passionate about life education, empowering and inspiring people to achieve high, and I think that resonates so much in relation to your work in the integration department. How did you start? Just to give our readers some tips and encouragement. Well, integration? Such a big word. Anyway, I think for me, it was looking for how best can I contribute to the place I live in. How best I participate and make a difference. So, the integration Council was the platform I found here in Helsingør municipality. And I think what motivated me or pushed me was many of the things that I saw written in the newspapers, the local newspapers, or what I heard on the TV, the debates I heard from the politicians, concerning integration. My personal view in this was that there was a lot more weighing on the negative part of the fore-runners in these debates, than the positive, and I could clearly see, I knew a lot of examples where there was a lot of positive stories, but these were nowhere to see or debated.

And so, it was important that I could participate and give a more balanced story. And be that voice for those who were voice-

less, those who could not speak back and respond to all these different negative statements being said. I felt that many foreigners were silent, but that's because they didn't maybe have the platform with which to respond. And I think it's only fair enough, that when you speak about someone that you give them the platform to also respond. It is only fair in a debate where you talk about two parties not to draw a conclusion before you have heard both stories. And you have seen both sides very clearly. And that's what motivated me to start being involved in participating, and hopefully bring a more balanced dialogue.

And many years later (2021), you will be running for the local council in Helsingør – what do your electorates need to know about this decision?

First, thank you for believing in me, that's what I wanted to say. It means a lot – just every form of support in the sense of people believing in you or cheering you on is very important. And that is why I don't take being part of this podcast series for granted.

Like I said, I am a single mother and raising three kids. I lost my husband in September 2016, and so it's not been easy. It was also during that time when I did my master's degree at Lund University, and I took the decision to pursue and complete it against all odds. So, I was going back and forth commuting between Denmark and Sweden, it was very tough, but I did it because I knew that I needed to complete my education for the sake of my children. And with all this, I just understood that this would be what also my late husband would have wanted that I accomplished – things that I am passionate about.

My biggest passion is in health and well-being of people. That is why I did the first bachelor's degree in global health and nutrition. And then I followed it up with a

master's degree in Public Health. I know that for everything we do, whether it is jobs, we must help people to do it in good health. And if they're not doing well, if their mental health is not well, or other aspects of life, then it is not good enough. My focus is on people it is their wellbeing.

And another area that I'm very passionate about is integration. I think it is very important to integrate those who have been accepted in the country, and that they have access to jobs and feel home here. I also feel that there needs to more women in leadership as a part of the integration story, there must be more women participating politically. In my culture and probably other migrants, women are commonly left behind – out of public decision. This is something we should help around. When it comes to jobs, I feel that we need to start ensuring that women are participating on equal terms, and empowerment is a very key word for me. My goal is always to empower people so that they never are left in a situation where they're receiving hand-outs, but they can stand on their own two feet and then continue to work or support their families.

So, I see my running for the local political platform as an opportunity to be able to reach even more people. Right now, I am the chairperson of the integration Council in the municipality, it has been a good platform to make a difference in the especially residential areas. I have been involved in different projects, and supporting different projects at the council, we have done this together. But I feel like the next step for me would be to directly get involved in politics and be able to reach out to many of these women and families. on a broader scale.

***I normally ask about the challenges that you've met on the way – could you point to any?***

First, when you're a woman in leadership, you also face challenges just because of being a woman. And then in my situation being a black woman. I feel like there are sometimes already prejudgments people have of somebody coming from Africa, for example based on what one has seen on the television, or if in the media one is constantly presented with an image of people that are starving and begging for help. This is the image that maybe is imprinted in the minds of the majority that see these kind things. So, when I come on a platform to talk or take part in a debate, I think I have a bigger challenge in first convincing people that a woman can contribute fully, and at that a black woman in leadership.

And I have faced this not only in politics but also in the church, because I am also preaching the gospel. So, when you are in a church community, there is a lot of prejudices as well, because there is an understanding in some groups that a woman cannot stand and preach. And a woman should not look in a particular way or there are all kinds of limits set for you. So, I find myself not fitting in anyone's box and luckily, I don't like to fit in boxes. Which is the reason why I feel like then let me go out and face those challenges.

***If you looked back, the day you arrived in Denmark, and you were looking at yourself, is there something you would have changed? What advice if any would you give to you on that day?***

This is a very interesting question, Andrew. Just to start, I grew up under a father who was an ambassador. And him being an ambassador, already threw me into a very international environment at

a very young age. I went to international schools amongst children from all over the world. And when I came to Denmark, I first came into the international people's college, which again, was very international with people from all over the world. But I wasn't confident then. So of course, the only advice would be, be more confident. But of course, that doesn't happen by itself. It happens only when you meet the right people around you, that begin to encourage you, motivate, and empower. So, I just happened to be very blessed that I met the right person. So, I don't know what I would really advise myself, I mean, from our talks, I think I would say three things. Believe in yourself.

Be open.

Work hard.

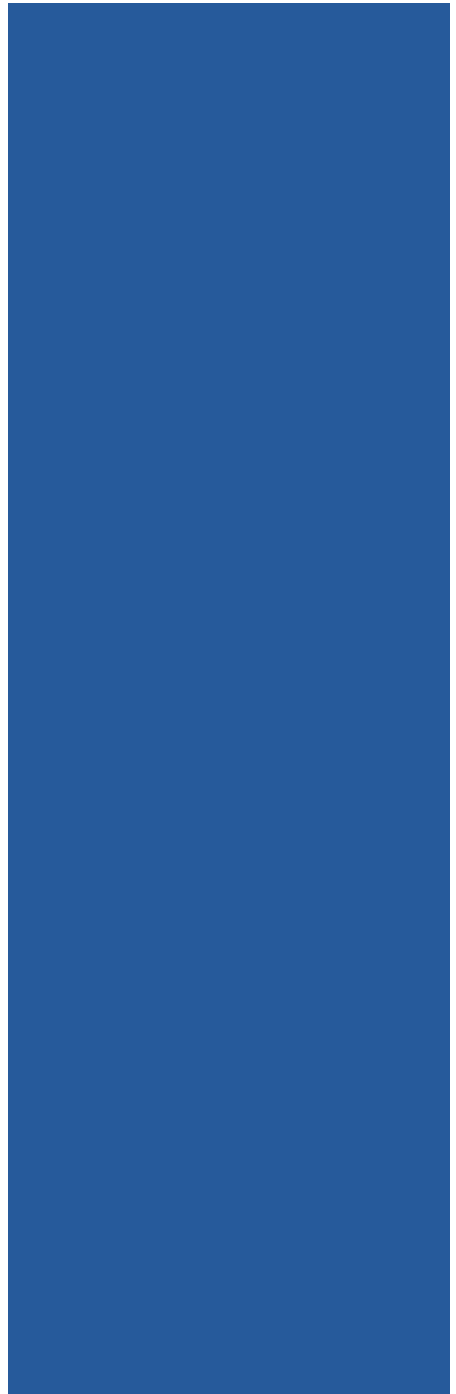
A little tribute to Henrik – Carol's late husband:

My late husband, first of all want to really underline that when I first came to Denmark, I was completely not a confident person. I was very broken down in my personality in my character, because I grew up under a household where there was a lot of violence in many ways. I had a stepmom, and she was tricky person. Sometimes abusive verbally very and so many words that were spoken over me as a child broke me down emotionally, mentally, and my confidence was at zero. It was that bad.

I did not believe in myself one bit; I did not even want to look in a mirror. So now when I came to Denmark, and met this man, who then became my husband, he just continuously – and I don't know if that was his purpose in life, but he continuously just spoke life into me. Continuously told me who I was and how my potential was huge. He reminded me constantly of what I could do and who I was and what I could achieve as a woman as a person, and what he saw in me and the leader he

saw in me. It was just like, part of our conversation in our day-to-day life.

And when he told me how beautiful I was, I began to believe I was beautiful. The encouragement that came with knowing him, really built me up as a person and brought me to this place where today I am bold, and I'm confident, and I can contribute and participate without any fears. Henrik really played a big role in my life. Thank you so much Carol.





## Daniel Halala's Story

Daniel is a longtime acquaintance in many rights.

Daniel is the Founder and Director of the amazingly impactful and fast-growing Impact Roaster, who are importers, roasters, and distributors and rosters of coffee, mainly imported from Ethiopia. And now they have opened several coffee shops, and the last time we talked he was telling me than they have three shops in a line. Danielle is also a father of two beautiful babies, and a husband. He is a trusted friend, and always open to give advice and talk about life.

***Daniel will you not introduce Impact Roasters for our audience?***

I am happy to tell people what we are doing because we want also other people to do, something similar. But I just want to go a little bit back and start with the whole story of how Impact Roasters was born. I'm from Ethiopia originally, and you might know that Ethiopia is believed to be the mother land of coffee Ar-

abica. And coffee and Ethiopia is almost synonymous. You can call it a very big part of the Ethiopian culture. And unlike other countries, in Ethiopia everyone roasters coffee at home. And we started drinking coffee as small kids. So, I started roasting actual coffee when I was five years old – and every time my mother was busy, she used to say Daniel come and take care of the coffee. And the problem was I used to eat a lot of the beans and sometimes when I was finished almost half had gone. So, she always used to tell me to be careful not to eat all the beans, but I was addicted to the beans more than the drink itself. And when I went to university to study, I topped up this traditional knowledge of coffee with other coffee business models, and a bit about fair trade, and other things.

In 2012 I moved to Denmark, and I have noticed the coffee drunk here was different from the coffee I know from Ethiopia. And of course, the way the coffee was made was also different. We make an Ethiopian coffee in a traditional way, you know, and here, coffee comes from many, many countries, almost from all over the world. Ethiopian coffee is also distinct when you are used to it. It is different from other coffees. So, I started thinking that maybe, I can bring some Ethiopian coffee, especially those with the different aromas and profiles than those present here. Because some of them are like spicy, fruity, and floral. Very colorful and characteristic.

So, I thought maybe it will not be exactly the same as the coffee that we do in Ethiopia, as it will anyway not be a few days fresh, but still we can do it fresh in a modern way, in a modern machine and all that. And then in 2014, I started doing my masters at Copenhagen Business School (CBS), in Economics and Business Administration. And when I was studying there, I was researching more about coffee. And I started taking active research on the mar-

ket and the different coffee varieties, and I immersed myself into it.

In this process I discovered that, Scandinavian countries are the biggest coffee drinkers per capita in the world. Norway, Sweden, Denmark. Finland, they are all in the top ten. Here, is also where coffee is most expensive. Combining these facts and the knowledge that we had good coffee in Ethiopia, I thought to myself – if I do not do coffee business in Scandinavia where and when should you do it.

At this point, me and my wife started talking about it and we agreed to give it a try. But we also wanted to do it in a more impactful way, not just bring the coffee, like a middleman and then start roasting. We wanted to do it in a meaningful way. So, we in 2015 talked to a family members and people that I know and friends and all that, and all gave me a go ahead. Then I went on to get some samples for different roasters and dealers, and I got very good feedback.

In the end of 2015, we brought our first container of coffee to Denmark. This was like 20,000 kilos on our hands in Denmark. I must also say that it was difficult to sell these off and we struggled a lot. You know we had a couple of roasters buying from us but on very small amounts. And majority of the other roasters and shops already had established suppliers from bigger markets like Germany or the Netherlands. And many would comment – but you only have Ethiopian coffee, and we want other varieties. But finally, after a year, it took me actually more than a year to finish these 20,000 kilos.

When we brought those tones, I had really much confidence. But with the struggle, then I learned more about the challenges involved. And of course, on the side I was learning how to work with modern

machines – not the Ethiopian way. For example, there was this guy who used to be a customer, he bought some coffee from me and said, I can roast coffee for you. And then I started paying him per kilo. And then I started running here and there to sell the green beans plus roasting some on the side.

At this time, we tried all kinds of things. I went to almost all NGOs, hotels, restaurants but it was very, very difficult to break into their market as a supplier, it was a roller coaster – and imagine that we had invested all out money in this. At the beginning of 2000 we bought a bicycle with a wagon, and we installed an espresso machine on it, but it was also a long shot. I would never sell so much coffee using a bicycle wagon – it would take 10 years. And then also started going to cafes and coffee shops, and these gave us a lot of advice that was important. Among others, one particular one asked us if we were branding ourselves – and so I started learning about branding, and actually I took a course in branding from CBS. And here I learnt that a brand always starts from zero – nobody knows our name, nobody knows our coffee, so it was not easy to convince people to change from a known brand to an unknown one.

One time I went to this bakery, and there was a guy, Kenneth, and he said, Daniel, this coffee is one of the best coffees I've ever tasted. You have homework to do. Work on your brand on your name.

People are not gonna buy it because you know, they don't know you now, you just came from the street – they can't trust you to come back tomorrow if they change their supplier. And that is just how it is, when you're new for the first-time people look at you, they take your samples – it is a free coffee. Nobody is gonna hate it, they will probably love it, but are never gonna shift

to you because they don't know you. They do not have a confidence in you.

So, he told me – you need to do your homework. So, it of course drained me, I hope for people to buy my coffee immediately, but I also learned a lot in this process. And then I said yes, now I know where to start. If I sell this coffee and luckily, there was a Danish company started buying some big tons, slowly taking more each time, and I was like - okay, if I really managed to sell this coffee without losing any money, then I know where to start and I know where to go. And we were happy when we sold it all.

By now we were dreaming even bigger. There happened to open a possibility for a coffee shop where we live in Valby, in the station called Langgade. DSB advertised for someone to rent the station shop for three years, and we also knew that it had not gotten anyone to take it up for 3 years. So, when we finished selling all our coffee (20 tons), we talked to DSB to rent this shop. And then they said, yes, we will give it to you. They liked our concept, and so the real coffee story begun.

At this point we went back to the beginning or basics of things, giving or finding a name for our business. Our idea was that we wanted to do coffee roastery in a coffee shop, and after exploring different ideas we landed on calling our company IMPACT ROASTERS. So, in 2017 we ordered our first roasting machine, which takes about three months once you order. And in July 2017, we opened our first roastery with a 15 kilo – expensive roasting machine, which we believed was the right way to go.

After opening in 2017 we started getting our name out, with the local people starting to come and buying. Several people taking the train slowly, you know. And in a

year's time (2018) we opened another station (Valby Station), again with a roastery, because we want to create this experience that people can see how their coffee is roasted from bean to the cup. And as we set out at the start, we always wanted to roast the coffee fresh where local people can come in and pick up and get the coffee.

By not the company was slowly taking shape – It was not very easy, but it was much better than the time of the green beans, because now we can slowly roast our own coffee and sell to the coffee. We started having cafes and companies ordering more and more. And the team also started growing – we started with two people, then three, and seven, and now 10 people (in 2021). We are slowly growing. And of course, our plan as always is to open more shops and create freshly roasted coffee brand company.

I missed to say that in 2020 we acquired another station – Peter Bangs Vej, and we have ordered a machine for it. And we are now in talks with DSB to set up another one in Carlsberg station before the end of 2021. So, you will be able to always get fresh Ethiopian coffee at whatever station you land at in these places.

***Daniel this is an amazing story, but allow me to start from a dark side, were there any considerations in you that this would never work?***

Never. The thing is, of course there are always ups and downs, and a lot of challenges. But when I got into it, I said I will just give whatever it takes I have to fight for this thing. And I strongly believed that it would work. And of course, you have challenges you know – family time, financial matters, paying your rent, and paying your staff, sleepless nights – especially in

2016, but we remained focused. Me and my wife I must be very clear, so I do not leave her out. She was helping me a lot with administration, and I was more on the coffee part. It was not easy in the beginning but because we believed that we would do this thing. And you know, you learn, and you grow slowly, and you need to be patient. I invested in learning - I took this course in retail marketing, and then branding, and then the next etc. It is not after four or five years after we started that we saw us making some money – not a lot but we are doing well.

***What would you say to the people that see Impact Roasters now and do not know this story?***

I would say if you were starting something give it at least two to three years of a real fight – sweating without really gaining a lot. And that where actually many startups fail to reach because of course capital, but also impatience. But if they can survive the first three years, they will probably continue.

But there are also a lot of conditions for different people. Maybe I say 3 – 4 years because we had a more difficult situation. Remember that we were moving from Ethiopia, coming to Denmark, and starting a company within the first few years of our stay here. We did not know a lot of things, so we had to learn as we went on. So, if you already have deep roots in a place – a network etc., you will probably do it in shorter time.

Another thing is that Denmark is special – it is a structured society, no surprises, there is clarity of processes, and you can get support to your startup. Danes also value quality and product values – stories. They can get coffee from anywhere in supermarkets for even much cheaper price, less quality and all that. But they

like the whole story about what they buy, and people here are loyal customers. But this also means that due to the ambitions and innovativeness of startups, people are quite supportive of small business – small startups. And when you get a client, they will even recommend you to their friends and families.

***Daniel, I need to go back to the basis – how did you end up here, and how have you navigated the requirements on integration?***

I came here on family reunification terms. I met my wife in Ethiopia, she was working for a Danish company - she's an engineer. And, you know, I was working for a European Union project. I was working for an NGO. We met in Addis, we got introduced and then she asked me if I would like to come to Denmark. And the first time I came it was in the middle of winter. I think she was testing if I could survive the winter before she accepted to marry me. At this time, I had never seen snow in my entire life. And then I stayed from December 2011 until mid-February 2012 – almost two and a half months. Anyway, so I said, yeah, of course, I think I can manage, as long as I drink coffee. Then 2012 I came, we got married, and we now have two kids.

Job wise, I got my first job as a cleaner in a restaurant. I was doing the dishwasher for almost four months. Then I got a support job in a kindergarten from the Kommune because the restaurant I was working before closed. While I was helping out in the kindergarten for those couple of months I applied to CBS for masters, and they recommended me to take three supplementary courses. Which I did and passed and then reapplied for the masters, and now they accepted me in 2014. And then it is where the thought of this coffee thing started.

***Now you go back, and you face your young self, and you need to give yourself some advice before you come to Denmark. What advice would you give yourself?***

I would... I don't know. I have, you know, there are a lot of good things that I have I experience here in Denmark. But I, as you know, where I came from, we as kids were always enterprising. I used to sell bread and biscuits, and gasoline/kerosene for lanterns. And I used to do these little things to earn some pocket money. When I was in high school for example, I used to be shoeshine boy. And even after I graduated from university, I started a language school where I was teaching English. I also used to teach also in colleges and University, and I used to run accounts classes for students in accountancy. I also used to do like private advice and, you know, always thought of starting a consultancy firm etc.

So, if I should give advice to my young self, this is what I would say – just follow your dreams, follow your path. Follow where your heart is. And my wife always says, I knew you wouldn't sit in office at all. Of course, I would not, I am an entrepreneur running around and that is my nature. So, go out do something. Talk to people, go places, find inspiration.



## **Zach Khadudu's Story**

Zach is in his own right one of the specialists within communication. He has a long background in strategic and organizational communication, this including developing communication strategies and seeing these through. He has a background in IT tech, in which he has his master's degree. Zach is journalist and media producer for both TV and radio, as well as other sectors. Among others, Zach has worked with Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, Kenyan National Broadcasting agency, Trinity Broadcasting Network. And he has produced community radio programmes for German's broadcaster Deutsche Welle.

Zach is also a well-known public speaker, a community advocate and human rights activist, both here in Denmark and internationally. He also has a background in project management where he has been responsible

for Nordic cooperation projects among Sweden, Denmark, and Norwegian teams. And this including fundraising for collaboration activities. We also know Zach as theatre personality, here, among others taking roles in productions with paradox theater.

Beyond the professional side, Zach is a loving father and a friend, a person one would generally call a comfortable to be around both when times are easy, and difficult.

### ***Why did you choose Denmark? How did you end up here?***

I don't know if I chose Denmark, or Denmark chose me. Or it was just a matter of a sequence of events, or serendipities that led to me finding myself in Denmark about 11 years ago. But then I arrived in this beautiful country, and my first landing port, like most people coming from outside was Copenhagen airport late in the night on a winter day in January. And then I took my connecting flight to Århus, where I was joining the journalist high school - Denmark's journalist and media High School. I would say on arrival, the school was good and very organized for the new students. It was a pleasure to finally arrive.

About Denmark choosing me – ha, it is because sometimes we think we have chosen places, but as some people want to believe destiny has it also that those places have chosen us.

### ***Biggest differences on arrival?***

Well, the weather was a shocker. I knew my geography quite well. I knew it's a northern country. Now. Of course, I was coming from the tropics right at the equator with beautiful weather, all sunny, etc.

So, the Danish weather was a shocker like it is for most of us coming from the global south, or at least from Africa.

Another thing is that during the winter days everybody is inside. I mean, at a Collegium (where I was staying) in August at the beginning of the semester, there were not many people to talk to. A lot of the international students had not arrived – I was one of the first to arrive. It was cold, there was at least a week before school would start, and not many events to take part in. It was a very lonely time and country at that.

Another aspect of difference regards much of my political curiosity. You know, I've always been politically savvy. I like to understand how systems work, politics, and ideas that people hold, things like that. And I really admired Denmark. I still do admire Denmark to a large extent and especially the level of democracy going on in this country. You know, Kenya is a democratic country – at least on the yardsticks of having elections every five years, having largely peaceful transfers of power etc. And of course, there's always instances of violence and a few the displacements, but it being a relatively young democracy there are still a lot of things to learn. But Denmark really gives me an impression of a democratic country, right from the grassroots.

Another aspect is that Danes are not necessarily the most social people to newcomers. You kind of need to hang out with them to break the ice. You know, with a nice big glass of beer, and then you can have very interesting conversations. However, it is also most likely that they do not remember these conversations the next morning. With time however, you will end up being friends. This is different from Kenya where you can talk to strangers like you have known each other for years.

Of course, the food was different – oh my God. For the first week that I arrived in Århus I mostly ate bread and bananas because there was a kiosk, and bread and bananas somehow was the things I could relate to. You know, there were other things, but somehow, for the whole first week, my staple was bread and bananas for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I had an Australian roommate, and he had a different food culture and he somehow managed to locate some food shops where he could buy the foods he needed. For me it took a while before I knew I could get African food in the Arab shops or in the African shops. But now I am good with Danish food.

***You came to study, but you are still here several years later – how come?***

You know, it's typical that one thing leads to another, and another, and another. So, finish the program in Århus, then I decided to take a different education in a totally new direction. It was a bachelor's degree in computer science because I've always had a passion of working with the nexus between technology, communication, and people. So, I got this nice program that was a combination of computer science and communications in Roskilde University. And then I proceeded to take a master in the same, after which I started to work. And then we a baby with my girlfriend, and here we are.

***How have you navigated the requirements to stay – the integration contract?***

I will try to be general although I will try to make this general to speak for myself here.

So, my idea was always that I will be in Denmark for a temporary period and go back. And this is mainly because before I came here, I had a job and I wanted to

return and continue in that way. But when I stayed here for a longer period, I had to anyway navigate all the processes that come with that contract – language, getting work, being social etc. So, it was not a choice for me, and it is rarely a choice for any no matter the motive if you stay longer in Denmark.

I mean, if you stay in Saudi Arabia and you are even the remotest smart person, we know that you will need the language. If you stayed in France or in Kenya, you would need the local language to navigate. If you're not just a tourist for one, two weeks, you need the language. And language is always important for me, so I started taking Danish classes as soon as I went on to commit to staying longer.

And I must say, the tricky thing with the Danish integration system is that you can never really know what will happen to the rules in five years from now. But we also know that some things remain a constant for example, the language, the demand for that you are in work, respecting the rule of law – this is what makes the system of the country to continue to function well so even us new comers can claim space in it.

***Now that we are talking about the formal requirements – do you think the integration contract equals to integration? That when you have done all these things, you are integrated?***

And I'll just go on a limb here and say, I wish one day we can get all the major political leaders in this country and the major parties, and all the activists and ask them a simple question – Can you define integration?

The problem with this country and in many other countries and political talk is, we don't have a baseline of what we're talking

about. So, we have a lot of double speech – or call it speaking from both sides of our mouths. What a lot of politicians in this country – and this is my opinion and I beg to be forgiven if I offend anyone – is that they do not understand what integration really is about, but they believe they are experts at it. When most of them debate they do not mean integration, they mean and are demanding for assimilation. They want you to be assimilated into the Danish culture.

You know, I work with computers, and something called data integration or systems integration. When you're integrating systems, you're taking 2 or 3 different systems, and putting them together to work as a unit. So, if you are talking about integration, then it will mean you Andrew, you come from Uganda, you Ishmael, you come from Syria, you Thomas who come from Denmark, we are live in Denmark now. We want to be integrated to the Danish society as your person, not become something different. Bring your person and then let's follow some basic rules – for example, there's the rule of law that has to be respected, the language that has to be respected, and how systems work in this country that has to be respected. But when the talk goes beyond that and we want to define what you can wear or not wear, what you can eat and not eat, going into private lives of people that do not harm anyone else but rather a way of me or you are being you, then that goes beyond integration, and it becomes assimilation.

To give a historical example, this would remind me of African countries and some of their colonial masters (especially France) in the past. When you were deemed smart and civil enough (how much you acted French and undermined the local traditions), you would be granted permission to earn points to become a French gen-

tleman. And you would probably be shown how to wear a suit and express yourself like a Frenchman in 'real' French. But that was not integration – it was assimilation and we all as well as history agrees.

Unfortunately, that's what a lot of political talk in this country has turned into calling for. Integration has simply become a buzzword that they throw in here and there. They want a simulation, they want you to come in this country, you forget who you are, forget everything that belongs to you, you become us/Danish. You don't become you, you become us/Danish. So, integration is just a nice buzzword politicians use but what a lot of them are calling for is a simulation. We need to call things what they are.

But the changes in the integration rules are also a major challenge to how you position yourself in this society. For five years you could for example have that a university education qualifies as being engaged on the job market and then at the coming of a new government that is scrapped. I have known people that were at the verge of getting their permanent residence permits by a few months that suddenly lost the chance and time due to a change like that.

I will add that although Denmark also has a great respect for the human rights vs. the context from which I came, there are limitations to the decency regarding how we treat some people especially migrants. Sometimes you listen to debates, especially that goes on around integration and you wonder whether the people in these debates ever think beyond what plays to the gallery, the politics, the human rights as defined, or that they remember that beyond these there's the human element of it, and the need for decency of talking to each other in a civil manner.

***But how does this political discourse affect the efforts of the Kommunes in integrating migrants on everyday basis?***

You know, it takes two to tango, so I would directly say this talk doesn't help their efforts at all.

And that some of us also must take our share of blame. Some of us newcomers arrive in the country, and we tend to talk about immigrants as a homogeneous group. There's so many layers and complexities that define why people end up here. Some of us are students, others came as refugees, others family reunified to partners that we met here. Some of us got adopted into this country, some of us our parents brought us here, some of us were born here, but although we have a fitting here, we also have a fitting somewhere else. So, it's not one homogeneous group of people. The reference people usually make in insinuating it as a homogeneous group reminds you of the components of fairness in asking both the fish and the monkey to climb a tree.

So, we must look at specific target groups as having specific needs. So, asking everybody to learn Danish and speak it at this level, you come here you must start work and you must hold onto this work for five years before we can consider you resident, etc., just creates so many blocks. I mean, asking somebody perhaps who has been to a war situation, or an elderly person who has been moved off their lifetime home and lost everything, found refuge in this country, asking that person to be able to learn language, to get a job, to start caring for themselves without taking regard of the mental torture, trauma, post stress disorders that they have is just not human. So, we must reevaluate this standard. Of course, people must show some level of responsibility towards the society that they're coming into, but then

let's be human in those systems. Let's define things that are realistic, and that have the right intent.

I have one more example. As we talk, there's this whole thing that every refugee that comes gets this residence permit that tells them, the intention is not that you will stay in Denmark, and yet some of these people will end being here for 10 or 15 years. And if every day the drums beat, they hear "you will go back at some point", how much energy should they put into "integration"? Or should we write these off since they will not stay here, and never talk about them now being integrated? And what if we told them we are here to give you safety and concentrate on settling them in. For some of them 15 years is all they are left with of active life, and we owe them the chance to be fully active here, instead of being worried for the 15 years.

***If we call on the local society, and the Kommunes, what would you leave them for advice?***

Ha ha ha.... As if they will listen to me! Anyway, if they were to listen, I think Denmark is one of the countries with a very educated population as a fact. We have a parliament full of well-educated people, they know the facts. They know that Denmark is a small country that cannot exist, by and on itself. They know they will need immigrants. They know that they need this young population that comes into this country and have energies and enthusiasm to create new energies for example, in the service industry – the bus drivers, restaurants, cleaning sector etc. And there is also a huge gap in the corporate Denmark – in the computer and security world. Danish companies know that they need this talent.

I should also say that behind the scenes,

Danes are nice, wonderful people who understand the human element of migration and stories and challenges of refugees, of falling in love and family reunification, and things like that. But then, in front of the cameras they get trapped in the game of talking to their electorate – the language of the political party. So, my advice would just be if we can change the tone of the politics from spinning to being straight with facts, because these speak for themselves. These facts – statistics will tell you that there are people from other countries working in this country. But the tone of our politics – of hate speech, supremacists, us versus them, only hurts and demoralizes the migrants. And that that's why podcasts like this are very important, that the voices of those people that are being talked about just as subjects, become a part of the conversation.

I also talked about what you call the baseline or defining what do we mean when talk about integration? So, I would advise the society and Kommune, as well as the political space to be more aware of what integration is, and that it is different from assimilation.

Moreover, what we keep saying is that Denmark is a democratic country that has signed up to all these international treaties, about protection of human rights. And the rights of people show up to your borders as refugees or asylum seekers, and that we would follow the due process involved in that. But when the government, and the system's start to go against internationally agreed principles of how you treat refugees or asylum seekers, then that's where the issue comes. Because of the quota system for example we have a huge population of refugees in countries like Uganda, Kenya, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, etc., and such a systems permits/ the logic is that even though the numbers are big, if everybody took a small share

of it, then the problem can be solved. The fact is, you cannot let other countries to handle the burden alone.

Another thing is help people to get into a social network. It is already difficult enough due to the very private nature of people in Denmark, so there will be a need for efforts to support people to get into networks – both social and professional. You see, when you go to career centers or professional meetings they'll talk about networking and networks, and it is true, it's always about networks. But when it comes to social networks, we the newcomers must always do the heavy lifting. You are forced to go out there and actively seek the social network. So, the authorities and the local society could already run on this.

### ***Advice to someone coming today?***

I would say the following.

Denmark is a beautiful country, well governed, the systems and institutions work, it's a rights-based society where people are free, there largely respected opportunities for all, there is a great level of innovation and sectors that are aspiring for better etc. Denmark is a Silicon Valley if you have an idea, there's so many startups in Copenhagen, there's so many systems to help new businesses startups, there is sustainable technology, it's a place you could achieve your dreams.

That said, it's neither a walk in the park. There is a lot of negative rhetoric going on, that you must sustain. There is a lot of hurdles that you will have to jump over. There is the language that is not the easiest thing in the world, that you will have to learn, there is the networks that you will have to build and go out there. But people have done it, there are people who came before us, there are people that came with us, and there will be people coming after us who will continue to do it. So, I mean,

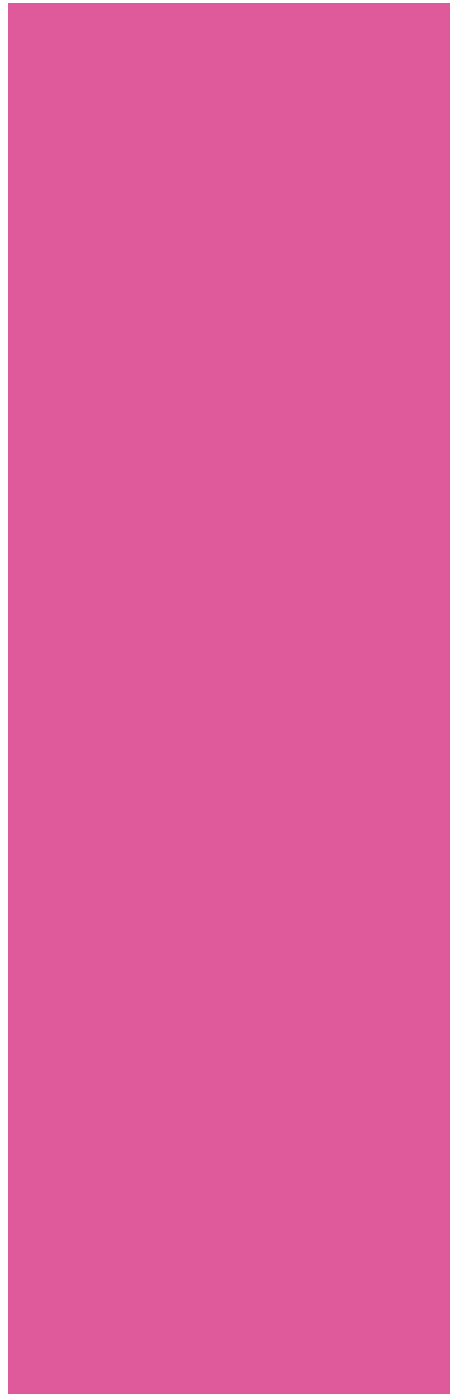
welcome to Denmark.

Now on your side, come through the right channels, if you're coming for studies, come with your study visa. If you get an opportunity to stay with a green card or something, stay, try to get a job. Follow the law, in the long run it is just good for you and good for everybody else. If you come as a family reunified, live up to your family reunification requirements, learn the language, go to school, do whatever it takes to fit in. At the end of the day, you can only do what you can, and then hopefully the system becomes more humane, more understanding.

Join an interest group – it will be an easy way to get into a network and learn more about the country. There is a beauty with Denmark – even though it is a small country, there are interest groups of all kinds. So, if you're interested in politics, like I am, you will get activists that are interested in the same things that you are. If you like sports, there are all kinds of social sports groups and clubs and things like that, but you have to actively put yourself out there, maybe it's uncomfortable, but that's what you have to do. The same thing is with the job market, you can apply all you want on the advertised positions with very little luck. But beyond that, you just need to put yourself out there, find a meetup, find a professional group that works in your area of expertise, find Danish friends, go to the meetings, clubs, it is difficult in the start, but it is a passing cloud.

Go to school, upgrade your qualifications to fit the new job market. I mean, if you have an opportunity to go to school, the thing is, if you go to language school you only meet people like you who come from outside. But if you have an opportunity to go to education in university or high school then you have a better chance of meeting more Danes on an equal ground, and

hopefully making friends with them, going out, and doing things that they also like to do. Moreover, once you get into these professional networks (school based) the people here are more aware of the global context, they want to understand different cultures, they dream of traveling the world, and easily accept differences.





## **Zikoh Jean Luc's Story**

Zikoh's career spans a wide area with-in business development and financial services. He has worked among others with Copenhagen Commune as a business consultant within the Copenhagen International house. He has worked as an advisor, again with-in Copenhagen Commune to startups from ideation to practically running businesses and finding financial services and capital for such businesses. He has had span as a liquidity management assistant on a portfolio of up to 50 billion Danish Kroner within the Commune as well as working with Saxo bank within their financial services department. Beyond the professional Zikoh is the father of a lovely daughter, he is a great friend to many, a volunteer advisor to many startups within Copenhagen and Denmark, and for sure, and a public speaker around business development and investments.

### ***How did you end up here?***

Basically, I came to Denmark, solely because of my parents. Because I came when I was eight years old. I celebrated my nine years old here in Denmark. So, it wasn't my choice to come here you can say, but that was only because my dad was working as a diplomat, and in his moving around Denmark happened to be one of his workstations and so the whole family got moved to Denmark.

My father was an accountant, basically, the person dealing with all the financials and making sure that the economy of the embassy was hanging together, and people are getting their salary and stuff like that. After that, he got promoted to the Economic Council, which is basically taking care of promoting the country internationally, making partnership with people with the Danish companies, etc.

### ***Surprises and or differences on arrival?***

I mean, I was very young, the smallest in the family of five siblings. What I remember is for us children, it was excitement going to Denmark, because my dad had worked in Canada before, and we had these memories. So, for him and for the family it was like going back to the global North where you would have a winter and stuff like that. However, for me it was my first experience with degrees below zero, and a big surprise at that, but for my siblings, it wasn't a surprise. And when I was relating my surprises to them, they were kind of like, well, this is how it was in Canada and so on. And every time people were saying to my dad, oh, you come from Africa, so it must be cold here. He would say well, I've been in Canada before this.

Socially, I remember coming to a place where you were very confined indoors.

Where we came from (Ivory Coast) we will plaid a lot outside with other kids. And in our neighborhood, you know, we will be outside all day. And here coming to Denmark, it totally changed, we were inside all the time. And I think I watched a lot of TV as an entertainment. Another thing that occupied me was going to school.

Other differences that I met were mainly in school when you interfaced with other kids, and meeting different cultures, different ways of doing things that were different from what I was used to. And I had to adapt to that. But because it was in French, the school's format itself wasn't such a big difference because still, I would use my language to express myself. In fact, I could say that we had kids from Danish families that were more shocked at the differences – especially the language that I was.

### ***Real meeting with Denmark?***

Even though was French school, there were a lot of Danish elements to it. That is basically where I learned the Danish language at first. And now that I think about it, a teacher would kind of like, teach us things from a Danish perspective and not the French point of view. So, it was a way of getting us into the Danish ecology, through songs, going into words, writing the language, and stuff like that.

But it was difficult because we anyway were spending the rest of our time with our families and therefore being detached from Denmark. And we did not either give it a lot of emphasis. You see as a diplomat, you get to stay say three years in a country, and then you, are likely to move to another country, so, there was this uncertainty and therefore a limit to how much your parents encouraged you to learn aspects of the current country. And I remember telling my dad, why don't we go to another country

like Switzerland, for example, because we had heard a lot of beautiful things about other countries. So, we were not mentally settled to stay in Denmark for many years. But I am happy he did not listen because Denmark has a lot of things to offer children and life in general that your do not identify in the random information you get about other countries. For example, when you talk of security, possibilities for your kids to get an education and a good one and free at that.

### ***How did you end up staying here after all these years?***

After my father's tenure of two terms, there was political unrest in Ivory Coast, which made it a bit difficult to return to, and unattractive at that stage. It also kind of stalled the diplomatic process of moving people around as the government tried to buy more time to settle down, so people were left at their posts for longer time that had planned.

And then my dad, who is very much into religion - a strong Christian, had already started being a pastor in his free time. He had already started a small group with people and praying and stuff like that. So, he was approached and asked if it wouldn't be a good idea for him to stay and continue as a church minister. So, he went from being a diplomat to being a minister. And that would allow him to stay. And that was, some years back where there was more openness for these types of new ways of people coming into another country. Here it was for advantages of new religious communities in Denmark. But so, he took that chance, and you know, it was already something he was doing. And that allowed us, especially me to stay, because I was a minor at this point - only 16 years.

## ***Career and work life in Denmark***

Now when I think about it, having attended French school and coming from a Francophone, I had the possibility to go to France. But being so young, I instead stayed here, to do my studies in an environment that I already knew, and of course, where my parents and my family were. And that is really when we started you can say integrating in the Danish society because being a diplomat, you are in a closed bubble, but now it sprang, and we started actively being part of the bigger Danish civil society.

It is also around that time that I started thinking, if I'm to study and to stay here, and to have a job to increase my chances, I need to be better at Danish – I cannot just continue speaking English. So, I understood, and started actively following what was happening on the integration side and seeing that, okay, if you stay here for that amount of time, you get a permanent residence. And if you after the permanent, you can ask for a national citizenship. You know, I kind of like myself, took some Danish courses on the side, to make it easier for myself. And I also went on to join Neil Brooks college, and later Copenhagen Business School. Doing a bachelor's in economics and Business Administration, and a master's in applied economics and Finance, respectively. And then the career led me into the financial and business markets. Interning and later working in Saxo bank, and then Copenhagen commune.

### ***What have been your biggest social inclusion and or career path challenges?***

Yeah, there has been many. And language being one of the one of them. You see, there are different levels of how well you know the language, and you certainly need the Danish language to function in society in Denmark. For example, when

you work at a place, you need to be able to know the language to do your work, but you also to be able to socialize with your colleagues.

Culture is the other thing. And you cannot undermine Danish culture – how you do things here. People are proud of their culture, how you behave in the public space, and under what situation. And Danes being both private and polite they are slow at letting you know that you are stepping on their toes if you are doing things wrong. So, understanding the unwritten rules and behaviors, and not understanding why my friends and people of the community were not outright about some things, or did somethings different was a struggle and it took time to break. But in all this, I learned that when you ask people, they are more than willing to help you understand the intricacies of how to fit in. I can give you an example of saying random statements at a workplace and hoping to be as ironic as the Danes sometimes try to be, but if you do not understand the rules and the timing of the irony you could end up annoying off people. Then when you come to work people are not talking to you – leaving you hanging alone.

Another aspect of the culture, which is a big barrier is the independence/independent life and behavior of the Danish people. People learn to decide for themselves and what they want very early in life, and they build this over the years. So, when you come in at a much older age and are used

to deciding things based on the social group this can be a major challenge and it was for me. It also becomes a stronger challenge at the workplace. People expect you to be independent, to do your job when you are playing a role. But you also need to have a balance with you doing it all alone and being a team player. So,

keeping this balance takes some time to learn and eventually fitting in. It is a navigation.

And then there is also the flat structure in society – both socially and at work. People at work talk directly to their bosses like colleagues, and sometimes you wonder how this can be when you yourself come from another culture with hierarchies. Examples of going to your boss to ask for advice on a role you are playing and not appearing to be incompetent are somethings that take time to learn, and these also point back to the dynamic of independence vs. the need for support to continue being independent.

### ***Three advice points to a person newly arriving in Denmark:***

The first thing I would say is that Denmark is a land of opportunities – and that is commonly the reason why people are ending up here. And I would take time to talk about these opportunities and how to fit into the best places to enjoy the opportunities as fast as possible for them to settle in. For example, I would tell them that the language is an alfa and omega aspect, no matter where you work. You will need the language to fit in well both professionally and socially, so learn it quick. There are learning or further education opportunities that many people do not take advantage of. These are opportunities that the government has put in place to help migrants to reach quick inclusion – so I would advise them on this.

But I would also be open about the challenges. The language is very difficult to learn but as said you need it. So, take time to learn it as fast as possible. The culture of people being very private and independent, and your behavior in this way to gain trust of people to let you into these social networks is a very decisive step to take. And being open about the social flat-

ness of the country as a both a benefit but something that must be respected.

I would advise them to be open, outgoing, being part of events and social gatherings etc., because this is where you meet the real Danish people. You need to meet people several times and experience social life with them in other contexts before they invite you home. People want to build good understanding of who you are first before they count you in.

In all this and connected to the above – fitting in properly both on the short and long term, stay authentic. Try to fit in, play the rules, network, learn the language, but do not change yourself fully. If you are an extrovert and can always find ways of talking to people and making them comfortable around, you this way continue that. If you on the other hand try to be private and shy, you will suppress your character and you will not be able to give your full self to the people around you, and therefore they will not know who you are. Remain authentic.

Finally, you are not the only non-Dane here. People are coming to Denmark from all over the world and all of them will face the same challenges and opportunities you will face. This will help you not to exclude yourself as specially struggling but also know that there are others also trying to make it into the society here. And this, like for you, takes a lot of work for all.

Thank you so much Zikoh.

You are welcome.



## Saleh Moniri's Story

Saleh Moniri is an IT solution advisor, who has more than 15 years of experience in IT and technology solution consulting. Saleh's academic background consists of a bachelor's degree in internet science and in technology, as well as a master's degree in information technology and learning. Saleh is originally from Iran, and at the beginning of 2017 Saleh moved to Sweden as a student, and right after completing his master's degree, he opened his own IT consulting company in the city of Gothenburg. Today, Saleh is here to share his story, his experience of working and starting business in Sweden.

### ***How and why did you end up in Sweden and not any other country?***

Well, I have several reasons to move to Sweden. I can say there were like some research I've done regarding the education in Europe, and I found Sweden with high-ranking educational level, and the

opportunities that they give to people in Sweden that you can have opportunity to work, to develop and to learn, which is like the most important things for me at that level. And, I've had chance to come and visit my relatives in Sweden in 2015, and when I was here, I liked the lifestyle and maybe it's strange, but even I like the weather here. And it was an interesting place. And yeah, I then decided to move to Sweden, and the fastest way I found based on my goals was to continue my education. So, I then decided to apply to get my masters, and I chose at the end, Gothenburg University. And yeah, that's why I'm here.

### ***You mentioned the weather, do you like the weather in Sweden?***

Yeah, that's strange, I do. I have grown up and been living in the Middle East, in Southern Iran, and here the weather we have in summer can reach 50 degrees Centigrade. Then I moved to Dubai, and there also it is the same hot weather. So still, I have that warm weather in my body after five years being in Sweden. But yeah, I do like the Sweden weather because I get the chance to experience the different seasons as they change. But we have rain in Gothenburg most of the time.... ha ha ha.

### ***Can you please tell us about your feeling on arrival, or your first impression? Maybe the first cultural differences you noticed between your home country and Sweden, and any challenges you had to adapt to.***

I'm an adaptive person, flexible within situations. That is an experience I had when I first moved to Dubai, and when I came here, I didn't find it that hard to adapt to this country and with the people because I have experience of living in Dubai, a multicultural country. But also, I have my relatives and made many friends here that have helped me a lot to get along with the

society. I am also curious about learning about the society, learning about the culture, European culture, and trying to get the positive side of the culture and adapt myself with that. This helped me a lot.

***Now, what about the language? Can you tell us about your experience learning the Swedish language?***

I must admit, I like this Swedish language, it has a melody. I feel that the vowels and the sound is like, interesting in the language. But it's hard to be honest for someone to come from the Middle East, and to have no experience with European language. It is not easy to learn, especially to pronounce the words, but I'm doing my best, and since I moved here, I didn't waste time, I just take the opportunities of participating in some courses, from SFP, for example, and some other schools and, I did some online, I'm use some Duolingo apps, for example, to train my Swedish. But the missing part was the speaking part for me. And it's still a mystery, I struggle with finding people to talk with. And my master's degree here was International, and we had no Swedish contact. So, I still struggle with talking, speaking, but I'm doing well. Actually, I finished my SFP and I started the SAS, so things are going well.

***What I understand is that the school can help you with some grammar and writing and you need to communicate with people?***

Exactly. You know, the thing is a school (SFA) is this free opportunity that the government gives to the newcomers. It is good for you to get the base or basic information about the language. You get the structure and the grammar, the writing things and reading. They help you a lot with those things. But the problem everyone faces when you want to learn a language is practicing the language - talking with some people. At the school, you definitely talk with your classmates and with

the teachers and some people, but the classmates are like you, they are new in the language. They talk but you don't know if they're talking right or wrong, and that might have a risk that you learn the wrong things. Of course, there are some opportunities to go for a language cafe, or some people, they would love to talk with you in Swedish and sweet people. But it's hard to reach them and it's hard to get along and to find the right person to talk with you know. But it comes with time. If you work hard on it you have the opportunity to learn more.

***Now if we think about the differences between your home city, Bandra Abbas and Gothenburg, can you tell us about the differences, the similarities or what you think!***

There's no similarities:-) I think the only similarity I can find is that both are port cities. And oh, we have different cultures coexisting just like Gothenburg. The music is also diverse. But the weather, the culture, the people, everything is different. Bandra Abbas is a smaller town than Gothenburg. Bandra Abbas is a warm city, it's like Spain, how the people are active, they are happy, they keep dancing, singing etc. Of course, the rule in Iran, they don't let us do many things. But still, our city is known as a city of music.

***If we talk about what is your passion, or what are the skills that enable you to settle down, and to be integrated in the local community in Gothenburg, in Sweden?***

Well, the passion I can say is being a social person, being adaptive, and being honest with people. These are some positive things that I have had. And it helps me a lot to integrate with the people and the society, and learn. And I'm curious about learning, I love to learn, I love to experience new things. So, I don't limit myself to some sort of things like you are not al-

lowed to do. So I think one of the positive things that helped me to be able to integrate with the culture was that being open to culture, and being positive about things.

Another passion is technology, and the technology and digitalization is a hot topic in Sweden. So I get along with that easily, and my education, experience, and interest are related to these things. And even my company I opened is in technology.

***Yes. Now after you finish your master, did you look for jobs? Because I see in your biography that you started your own company. What do you think about the labor market in Sweden?***

Good question. Actually, the process of job seeking for me started when I was a student during the time of university. I started looking for jobs and participated in job fairs. And I continued looking even after graduation. I got that six month period of job seeking visa (Green Card), so I could try to find the job. But the problem or the challenge I had, was the language barrier. It was really hard. Here everyone - say 90% of people speak very well English, you can do everything you want in English, but when it comes to the job market, to being hired, even though they say it's for an English speaking person, they prefer someone who speaks Swedish, they prefer someone who can understand the cradle language. So the main challenge, I think it was Swedish and it is Swedish still today. And that's why I said okay, I cannot waste my time anymore on not finding a job, the best way I can get experience is to start my own business. So it's the best way to let myself be in the job market - running my own business so I can hire myself.

But it has its own challenges. Again, the language barriers come again. When you have your own business, reaching the potential customer also means finding the right people for the business in a rigid

market. Also, learning about the administration and tax regulation. It's a lot that you need to learn when you have your own business, especially when you are not from Europe.

***Did you find it easy to start your business? For example, finding information on how to start your own company?***

That was easy. That was actually very easy comparing this part opening and running business in Dubai and Sweden. Sweden was super easy and cheap. I pay almost nothing to register the business. But of course if I have some income I have to pay high costs, but that is okay. Anyways, running the business, finding the information in Sweden etc., was easy and there are a lot of organizations that help you for free to register and develop your business, which I am still going to and gaining support from after one and a half years of running my own business.

***I want to ask you how to evaluate your social integration and social interaction with your neighbors here. After having stayed in Sweden about three or four years, do you communicate with your neighbors? Do you have Swedish friends?***

Actually, I have few contacts, and through my cousins here I found a bigger network. And they have grown up here, so they have some Swedish friends. I have also met many people during this pandemic online. And before the pandemic, I also participated in some events and workshops, so I have a network. But after university life and running your business, this makes everything difficult to enjoy. When you are a student you enjoy it more. You have classmates you go out with, etc., but you have a lot of tension after graduation when you focus on business and making money, and or on finding jobs.

***Now, I know there are differences between Iran and Sweden. Iran is very well known for a rich culture, and especially Iranian food. Just how do you find Swedish food if I were to ask?***

Yeah, Iranian food, or Middle Eastern food has tastes that I cannot find in Swedish food. But still I like some Swedish food and some desserts. For example, I like Swedish meatballs.

I also meet a few guests in this podcast, some of them must have mentioned that they like sweets - candies, cake, more than other dishes. Do you have a favorite sweet?

I like pies. Like blue bear pies, or ruburb pies. They are delicious.

***Now on the same topic about culture. Which is your favorite holiday in Sweden?***

The favorite Swedish holiday? I think it's mid summer, which is coming soon. The reason is like, the weather is nice, everyone is out and you can play and you can enjoy the dishes there. Also, some international holidays like Christmas or New Year where you still have some kind of traditional Swedish culture. It's funny to sit with the kids and watch cartoons.

***Now let us imagine that next year you will leave Sweden for one reason: for a job or something. Can you tell us about what you would miss the most from Sweden or what you would like to take with you, like a souvenir or other.***

Definitely one of the things I will miss is the development opportunities that I believe are a lot here. And what I take with me apart from the coffee - because I love or better still I am addicted to the coffee actually. But what I learned here is not judging people, or not seeing things from one direction, how would you be open minded.

Those things I experienced here, I've always been an open person every time I mean open minded and not being judged or not judging anyone. But here in Sweden I developed experience, and I see from the people how they give the chance to other people to develop. So this is the one that I definitely will take with me and I give opportunity to others everywhere else I go to talk about this and to give a chance to develop themselves.

***Now if we go back to the newly arrived Saleh in 2017 when you arrived in Sweden. What would you advise yourself in regard to settling in Sweden?***

Based on the knowledge I have now I would say be more active, enjoy more, get out of the comfort zone, and don't leave a space for negative thoughts and tensions. I had a lot during the time I had just come here and I think it was a waste of time.

***And if you were to give advice to someone that is coming from Iran today - 2021 on how to be integrated into Swedish society, what would you say to them?***

First, they need to be adaptive, they have to leave behind some culture they have back there in their own town and try to get some new things from the Swedish culture. If you want to live here, you have to learn about the culture and you have to take the positive things from that culture. And more important I say, believe in yourself and your capabilities if you want to find a job or do your business. Avoid or try at least to get over from the imposter syndrome they have? And I don't know if the people who are hearing us are aware of the imposter syndrome. This is the kind of feeling that stops you from doing things. It's kind of the small voice saying who are you that you want to do this? Who are you? It gives you a negative feeling.

So, trust and be positive about yourself,

make and learn from the mistakes. And as Michael Jordan says, I fail, fail, fail, and again, I fail until I succeed. So, try to do it, don't be afraid of doing it and here, they give you a chance. Even if you fail, they give you a chance to try it again. But don't abuse it. I also would like to mention that, when you move to a new country, and you decide to have this kind of new start, a new journey in your life, try to train your mind to be positive. Try to select the people who are giving you a positive impact in your life and have them around you. Don't interact with people who are negative every time. Trust in yourself, and believe in building a trust based relation with the people you interact with.

**My last question, how do you think this current Covid19 pandemic has affected the newcomers in Sweden?**

Definitely a lot. I mean, social life is affected, finding a job is affected. And people are struggling with many things such as the economy and even like having the opportunity to be invited for interviews or something like that.



## COMING TO THE NORDICS



### Tiago Prata's Story

Tiago is a local from Faroe in Portugal and Gothenburg in Sweden. He moved to Sweden in February 2013. Tiago defines himself as a cultural intrapreneur and he runs his own private, creative enterprise in this. He is also a cultural manager at Gothenburg based cultural enterprise called Tilt, while at the same time working as a project manager at Malmö city.

#### *What made you come to Sweden?*

Let me start by explaining the context of moving to Sweden. Unlike many other migrants, I am a white male, with an education from Portugal, and moving to Sweden or Nordics voluntarily. When I started thinking about moving somewhere else, which was around 2010, I was doing my Masters. It was still in the very close aftermath of the financial shock of the 2008 economic crisis, where due to the housing bubble and so on, Portugal was very highly affected. So, I was thinking I'm still young, and if I want to make a jump, or at least try somewhere else that was the right moment.

And, of course, in the south of Europe, there is this reputation about the Nordic societies being the best, having the high-

est quality of life, and very good living standards, social systems, education, etc. So, the myth around Sweden, Denmark, Finland and all the other Nordic countries, gets wrapped into this package of the perfect utopian society in the north of Europe that is circulated between people at least in my circles. And I was thinking, Okay, let's go and check it out, because they must be doing something right. And my plan was to join European funded internship or exchange – this was aimed at people that have finished their studies to go and have a professional experience in some other country.

And then I applied to all the different countries in the Scandinavia, and to many different types of places asking if anyone wanted to host me. So, I wrote to people my interests how I can contribute and given that I was already working as a journalist and as a cultural producer at the time, I also mentioned that I wanted to learn more about this from another perspective. And or maybe I can help with something in this direction. And by chance, a daughter of first-generation migrant couple that came to Sweden from Poland, that was working with European projects, thought that I was interesting enough, and then that's how I ended up here.

#### *How was it for you to settle here – staying longer, finding a job?*

At the beginning there were some sort of complexes that you have as a migrant, I think because, you bring some baggage with you as well. There is the cultural baggage, for example having this idea of this being the best society, where in which everything works well. And you keep identifying yourself as a stranger, and questioning yourself if you have the right to be here and why? But again, for me, it was still relatively similar conditions to what I guess a young Swedish person would have, because of all the advantages I came with – white, educated, and not to

forget male. So, I was thinking, I just need to find something that's going to give me enough money to survive and then we will see how that goes from then on.

But there was a strong inferiority complex, I would say that I had to overcome. That also had an impact on like, learning the language, and what chances I felt capable of taking and so on. But I had the luck and the luxury, I think of getting this job (my current job at Tilte) invitation delivered to my lap. That is, because I worked very hard as part of this exchange program that I was doing with the expectation that it would open doors – and it did. But had it not I would also be in a way happy to go back because I had the two alternatives – either I stay in Sweden, or I go and learn and bring the knowledge back to Portugal and do something with it.

### ***Some barriers to the job market***

I think there is some sort of cultural inertia when you move to a new place. For example, it took me time to start applying for jobs and going for interviews etc., I think mainly because I felt I did not fit in well. Let me put it like this – there the language barrier, which is a very big thing. I don't have light skin color like many people in Sweden. And this stood in my way a lot. I remember when starting to hunt for jobs there are many interviews I went for where I was much more qualified, but due to the language, which I would understand I did not get them. But the fact that they went to people that I was more qualified than, I would also question this system of employment. What are you valuing? Is it someone's experience, knowledge, attitude, capability to deliver or something else?

And I think this experience is probably familiar to many people that are applying for jobs in Sweden trying to get into the work market, especially in the cultural sector where I work. I would say several aspects

play in this job market – like the skin color, and where you come from, and maybe your accent or background. Even people that are born and went to school in Sweden but have distinctive differences from the majority culture face this kind of discrimination. There is always this thing that we need someone that fits the bureaucracy and the culture. And at that the culture of the majority.

But you know, at the end, I kind of don't let it get to me, because now, when I've done this journey, and I've overcome the inferiority complex, I'm thinking, it's Sweden's luck that I ended up here. For example, through my job I have brought more than 5 million euros to the Swedish economy since I joined. And in the future, I can bring much, much more, I could also do that for Denmark, or for Norway, or for any other European country. So, it has been nice to realize that I have value to bring to Swedish society. And some people have been smart enough to realize that and to choose to work with me. So, in a way, I'm liberated, and I'm a free agent in the sense that I can say, okay, you don't see the value in who I am and what I do, that's your choice. I will respect it. And I will do my own thing with someone else or somewhere else.

### ***How long did it take you to feel you are part of the system or now that you belong?***

Yeah, I would say no – I am not part of the system, I'm still an outsider. And I should add that I'm also out of the Portuguese system as well. But for my consolation, I've evolved into some, I guess, transnational citizen. And my work right now is also based in a minimum of three to four cities that are in two or three different countries. So, I am connected to different places, and I am active in European and global networks, which gives me input and communication channels about what's happening in different places. I am happy to say I'm not limited by the Swedish

system.

That said, I live here, I really like the country, I think that people have been lucky that some visionary politicians in the earlier years have developed a very good social system that provides the possibility of equal opportunity. I don't think we are there yet, but it provides the possibility if you persevere. I like to pay my taxes here and I will continue to pay them here. I have learned the language up to the level that I can function at in white, middle class, corporate cultural sector level.

But at the same time, I don't want to limit myself to only the Swedish perspective. I still want to have all the other perspectives in the world. So maybe, I am part of the generation of people that call themselves trans local, because they are thinking in different places at the same time, temporarily living in several places at the same time. And their work also puts them across borders. And I don't think this is only relevant for the cultural sector. And now, with this digital transformation that we've seen during the past year we will see more of this. I know some people that are working for a computer game development company and digital education company, that are based in Germany and the company is here in Sweden. And society will have to evolve with such shifts.

Well, to kind of return to your question, I'm not totally accepted in the system, but I am instead belonging to a broken-down group of systems – in this trans local phenomenon, and they are all part of the bigger system, which in the end doesn't care about the Swedish or the Portuguese. It's doing its own thing and going through transformation at the global level.

***If you have recommendations that you want to give to the ones who are moving to Sweden, what will help them to get into the system, especially in the arts and culture field? And what advice do you give to the system and whoever is sitting, controlling behind this system? To make it more receptive, more inclusive. And see the real value of the person beyond their color, their education, their nationality?***

Well, I don't I don't have like the recipe, and I haven't been thinking about this before. But maybe I have some ideas that might be worth exploring. I say, if you are in Sweden, then you are here, you can't play by the rules of Portugal or Egypt or wherever you come from. You must learn those Swedish rules. And I think that includes learning the language through the channels that the system has in place.

Get active in the society. You can volunteer for example, do internships or this kind of programs, do as much as you can, as quick as you can, because you need to learn the local rules, and it is through things like these that you learn. Because once you learn, and understand those local rules, you can make smart decisions. You will be able to answer questions like – what is my right? What do I want to do to? And where do I find things? And how do I relate to the people that are going to open or close doors for me.

My other tip is for you to know your value and to differentiate it for the society so they also can see it. It could be that some people coming to Sweden are genius engineers or mathematicians – and knowing that, such skills are on the positive list of Sweden then helps you to position yourself well. If you are an artist, or a creative or someone from that sector, then I think you should bring your international perspective with you. Or you can bring the capacity to create and mediate relationships to other people that are coming from dif-

ferent places, which represent one of the cultures that you identify yourself with and try to work on creating bridges and ways of, socially integrating the different people. But all this you can only do if you know what you really can offer – your value.

### ***And then to the system:***

I think there's this rigidity of the system that doesn't allow for new ideas and new perspectives to come in – and you need to be genuine about this, not just be politically correct. I know, for example, people at the university, or at the arts Faculty of a local university, that are working specifically with trying to attract people who have different skin colors, ethnical background, cultural background, etc., to study art, and sometimes it is too much of tokenism, or trying to be politically correct – not genuine.

Also, the system needs to find ways of not having 10 people sitting at the table making decisions that all agree with each other. We need more diversity in these decisions, more representation. I think by now we have scientifically understood that diversity creates value and innovation. So, if you have 10 people who have all seen the same children's TV show, and all went to the same school and all went to the same vacation place and all want the same in life, you're gonna be doing the same for a very long time and get similar results, and then you don't get to evolve.

So, what the system needs is to set into modalities that create space for a variety of representative ideas. Such ideas can both be applied locally but can also be relevant globally. To build these ideas, you need representation but be aware of tokenism. It needs to be done right, there needs to be equality of opportunity. And of course, sometimes you can justify yourself by saying, oh but the person doesn't know Swedish, or they didn't go to the school, or they didn't look somewhere else etc.

But invest in getting the people who come from different places and have different ideas, giving them the chance to have those ideas to the decision table and into real life.

***I would like to know if there is something from back home that you wish was here with you. And the other way around, something you could send to Portugal from Sweden?***

The obvious part for all Southern Mediterranean people that I would also love from Portugal is the sunny weather, but then I will go with the food. I miss this, you know. Part or maybe most tangible parts of your identity is what you like to eat. Food is related, not just to the material aspect, but to the social aspect of the meal and how the meal relates to family relationships or social life that you have with your friends, and you share.

For Sweden, now thinking of about this, the experience with a global pandemic and so on. I think there is some degree of civil responsibility and public dignity that Sweden has that I guess some places in the south of Europe or the global south miss. We know that it's a bit of façade when we talk about our countries being perfect – there's corruption everywhere, people are still poor, hungry and you know, they will push their neighbor to the side, if it means that they get a bit more for themselves.

And it's very interesting because one of the reputations about Swedish and the Nordic society in general is that it's a very individualistic society. However, even this being very individualistic and placing so much responsibility and freedom on the individual, still, they manage to show how they think for the collective wellbeing, which I think is quite ironic, but in a good way.

Thank you.

# A final word

We hope that you have enjoyed reading the stories in the previous section. As a final reflection on these stories, we have talked in our group about possible ways we could refocus the increasing demand for integration towards a more acceptable narrative for inclusion. This is captured in the discussion below.

## Exemplified narratives – and suggested reflections on inclusion:

On a human/personal level, the project is trying to exemplify to both the migrants and the locals in the Nordic countries that it doesn't matter whether people are speaking perfect Danish, English, Norwegian or Swedish, but that people get up every morning and are part of their local society, its lifestyle, and everyday dynamics.

By this I could take my own (Andrew's) life example. As of 2021 I have lived in Denmark for 11 years, I have two lovely children – my son is 11, and my daughter is 9. There is little of Uganda about these children apart from for having a big family there and often traveling and being familiar with the country. They are fully Danish, and not because I say it to them or I try to hypnotize myself to believe this – they are Danes born and raised in Copenhagen. The society also accepts them as Danes – their schools, clubs, friends, the airports/entry points, health system, etc. By it is not tragic or problematic than their father who was by the bed side on their delivery, changed their diaper across their toddler years, has several times made food them everyday, has over the years made sure that they are proper citizens of Denmark – teaching them Danish values. Reading Danish night books, and singing with them in "Alberte Synger med de Små", is written

off as not integrated?

In fact, as I wrote this example, I had to ask my wife if by saying that "my children have a connection to Uganda", will not politically polarize and get them deported with the argument that they have a bigger family in Uganda than in Denmark and therefore a bigger connection there. This is indeed some of the extremes we have witnessed, where some children in family unified marriages have been sent out of the country after the death of the strongest Danish connection or have lived a part of their lives abroad. We also took a discussion on the implication of gaining dual citizenship vis-à-vis your "proved strong connection" to Denmark. We ended up into a joke that maybe for one to be sure of not being judged lacking in Danish connection should skip dual citizenship.

Another example I commonly give is of a Ghanaian mother that fell in love with a Danish guy while he worked down in Taastrup and on his return to Denmark, he decided to have her come with him. They have since been married, and the young woman has now raised two teenage sons on 18 and 15 years. For the past 18 years she is the person that has made food packs "madpakker" to her children on their way to school. She has woken them up every single morning, changed their diapers while small, been the shoulder that they have cried on and recollected after challenges, and when the kids and her husband come home after their busy days there is always a hot meal made with love for them. The two teens are proud Danish citizens on their way to contributing the economy and society in a few years from now.

After all these years however, their mother still struggles with the Danish language and has tried several jobs and settled with

a cleaning job somewhere in a restaurant where Danish is not a big demand. Given that she had only achieved a high school education in Ghana and when she moved to Denmark, she immediately started with her mother role, she is insecure around anything academic and professionally connotating. She tries to visit the library occasionally but as soon as the talks become academically demanding she retracts to a corner and only watches as another mother in her group takes on discussions and dialogues one after another. Her safe space is her home, her chosen friends, her children, her husband, her restaurant job that gives her the agency to go by Føtex and contribute to the house economy – she loves Denmark. Should we demand more than that of her? Should we demand that she speaks fluent Danish otherwise she is not good enough?

I would say, we will and in fact are in the process of killing her self-worth – her agency in including herself in the Danish society. I would say, we should be more open to who she is and support her to continue doing exactly what she finds interesting as long as its within legal confines, as opposed to identifying all the wrong things about her. By this we will make the public place more secure for her, and instead if retracting from conversations it is almost certain that she will get more involved with time – and this might take a long time, but it is worth it.

A third example also around what we commonly believe as a successful integration, is in the definition of success itself. I remember we had this discussion and agreement within the project Coordinating Group, that success has to be defined by the person we are interviewing, where they reflect on their lives in the Nordics and find a spot they themselves believe was success. And there are many examples. Imagine a 30-year-old that has never gone to school, or at most achieved high school in Uganda, he comes to Den-

mark and is able to get a kitchen job. He for sure struggles a lot with learning the language, but slowly starts understanding and eventually speaking a little bit of Danish. Through his kitchen job he can fend for his family, and you can generally say that he has a settled life. When asked if he is successful, he nods in approval. He doesn't need to be a rock star he says.

So, when we were designing the storyline for coming to the Nordics and who we were going to interview, we intentionally decided not to start with the so called “success stories” as defined by and according to the integration criteria. Because what is success? We were in clear agreement that the moment you define success based on the definition of integration that leans more towards assimilation than inclusion, then you would end up in the same trap of success being only achievable for the exceptional few.

## Summation:

Those that have listened to the first episodes of the podcast have given the exact feedback we hoped for, ie. “this is powerful”. We have gotten artists like Moussa Diallo and Mpho Ludidi to donate songs to the podcast, as well as featuring the podcast project at the Danish Folkemødet 2021 as a grassroots support platform, and its foreseen significance in contributing to the social-cultural development of the local Nordics.

Our hope is that as we release more of the podcasts, and people read the compiled storybook, that these will create a basis for a stronger debate with time. The podcast as well as the storybook will then be utilized in training within the local communities the different organizations work in, as well as offered as a free online training material.