



EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

**shemakes.eu**

Gender and innovation opportunity structures in the textile and clothing sector

31/12/2022

INTRODUCTION

Female creativity and innovation potential are an under-exploited source of economic growth and creation of jobs. While women constitute 52% of the total European population and 59% of first level university graduates, they only represent 40% of employed scientists and engineers and 30% of start-up entrepreneurs. Women hold less than 10% of patent applications. While innovation can play a key role in addressing and solving societal challenges, policy interventions to reduce the gender gap need to go beyond STEM to address mainstream economic sectors. The textile and clothing industry is an ideal field for action, both for its strong yet undervalued role for women and the growing awareness of its significant social and environmental impacts, driving the transition towards more circular and sustainable practices. The shemakes.eu project explored the nexus between gender equality, innovation, and industrial transformation through a hands-on, lab-based, co-creative approach that attracted and empowered young girls and women alike. The action significantly raised awareness of the different dimensions of the gender gap in innovation through intensive collaboration among consortium partners and with thousands of active participants in different roles. The dynamics of transformation set into motion within the project's short lifespan constitute the foundations for the network's future sustainability. Shemakes highlights the need to focus gender policy on methods capable of overcoming stereotypes, specifically in innovation and entrepreneurship. By creating smart, sustainable, and inclusive innovation ecosystems such as the shemakes network, we can encourage young girls to become women innovators, provide them with the support they need to be successful, and contribute to increasing the number of female innovators in Europe. Implications for industrial policy, e.g., in the context of the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles (March 2022), not only include a better matching of skills to jobs but also a demonstration of how women innovators can lead the transition towards the circular and sustainable production systems that our economy, society, and environment so desperately need today.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The European textile and clothing sector employs 2 million workers, of whom female staff account for 74% of the total. The industry however still follows hierarchical and patriarchal models of production, where most women are considered as “producers”, instead of leaders and deciders. Two years of socio-economic turbulence (pandemics and world conflicts) leading to frozen production (and sales) of textiles and clothing have however allowed for time and space to collectively rethink how the industry could shift to a better and more resilient future, with a renewed importance on creativity, innovation and complexity, and the role that women can play – are already playing – in the search for alternative business models.

The shemakes project brought together two existing networks: Fabricademy, linked to the global FabLab network of over 1000 open innovation spaces, and TCBL: Textile and Clothing Business Labs, a network of labs and businesses applying innovation to sustainable business model transitions. Combining the innovative hands-on learning methods of the former mixed with the lab-based network approach of the latter, the project produced three main outcomes.

Shemakes gender vision

Together we transform women's roles in textiles and clothing

Together we get inspired to lead change in textiles and clothing

Our community of game changers



Girls who are curious about textiles and technology



Young women who want a new perspective on textiles and clothing



Innovative women with a career in textiles and clothing



Textile artists, fashion designers, entrepreneurs, activists



shemakes.eu labs and the communities in which they are embedded

shemakes at work

 What we do	 How we relate
Collaborative and hands on learning / experimentation	Networking women in T+C
Combining women's traditional textiles skills with latest technologies	Creating safe spaces for women to experiment and innovate together
Women taking risks, innovating and being creative	Nurturing women's pride in their creativity and encouraging knowledge sharing
Women leading change in the T+C sector	Addressing and challenging existing hierarchies
	Acknowledging emotions in decision and change

Our values

 <p>Equal Women participate and are rewarded equally in T+C education and work</p>	 <p>Collaborative Working with others sharing similar values</p>	 <p>Welcoming difference Valuing all women and girls and their contributions independent of their backgrounds and gender self-identification</p>	 <p>Empowering Women and girls to lead change in T+C and not be held back by gender stereotypes</p>	 <p>Inspiring Women and girls about the opportunities in textiles and clothing</p>
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The shemakes gender vision as the foundation for action

- *Evidence.* The shemakes vision is built on an alignment of values with activities and targets, combining excellence with purpose. Framing all activities within a common vision helped “reverse gender stereotypes, reduce the effect on gendered career and educational choices, and so reduce the negative effect on the value of women’s work and skills” (shemakes final evaluation).
- *Analysis.* The vision is designed as a change driver, playing a central role in the attractiveness and growth of the lab communities. Communication, through e.g. the viral “Shemakes Voices” videos and events, such as the “Wool Mondays” or the “Welcoming Differences” final conference, acted as drivers for change by making the vision clear, accessible and tangible. Role models such as “Gurus” (experts and mentors for learning modules and knowledge transfer) and “Ambassadors” (participants eager to share their experience with peers) carried the vision forward into practice as the network expanded. As the vision was applied, targets became more focused, activities were more closely tailored to needs, and the combination of action and relationships helped partners, labs and role models to mature, gain excellence, and extend the reach of their networks.

The shemakes activities as a menu and potential journey

- *Evidence.* The portfolio of activities, developed over two phases in parallel with the expansion of the lab network, is structured as a “menu” of possible modules in an online toolkit. The activities all aim to give girls and women the visibility, expertise and confidence needed to contribute to the necessary transition of the textile and clothing sector through possible and diverse career journeys. In two years, 18 labs in 16 European and associated countries engaged over 2000 participants in over 100 activities, 65 of which are new and documented in the open-source toolkit.
- *Analysis.* The development of activities followed an iterative process, where prototyping and testing were intensified with the extension of the network from the 6 Partner Labs of phase one to 12 additional Transfer Labs in phase two. As an example, explorations of the wool value chain showed that technical innovation is possible even in a stereotypically female situation (at home and traditional). Through an iterative development and transfer process, four types of activities emerged as key to supporting gender-based innovation; *community engagement* with local quadruple helix partnerships; *curiosity and discovery* as technology-based learning paths for young girls and women; *lab-to-lab research* exploring new areas of investigation through new modes of collaboration; and *innovation paths and business engagement*, exploring the bi-directional flows from startups to businesses and from unconventional backgrounds to independent innovators.

The sustainable shemakes model for resilient growth

- *Evidence.* In addition to the shared vision and highly successful portfolio of activities, the shemakes network proved its resilience and potential for growth. The expansion from 6 to 18 labs and from 5 to 16 countries was designed to provide lessons for yet further network expansion after the shemakes project is over. In the final months, 3 new Gurus (for a total of 9) and 12 new Ambassadors (for a total of 30) have been selected and briefed to carry the vision forward. The shemakes’ community and legacy will be carried forward under the umbrella of the TCBL Association (itself a network built in a previous “H2020 Success Story” project).
- *Analysis.* This traction is based on the dual finality of the shemakes community and the strong desire to boost the role of women in innovation. In the shemakes community, learning and practice progress together and enrich one another. This helps labs to build on their expertise and excellence while growing their audience, broadening their expertise for new and specific targets.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy implications

The shemakes results have strong implications for systemic gender policy:

1. Innovation and the discovery of practice-based knowledge in lesser-known STEM territories, traditionally branded as “male”, can lead to women empowerment.
2. This occurs when these processes are grounded in open and effective methods for the development of people skills and the collective support of cooperative network building.
3. These processes are in turn reinforced by the development of different types of role models, not only hero figures but equally those who can concretely share their experience as peers and their expertise as inspirers.
4. These dynamics gain purpose and drive when situated in the context of a broader vision for action, anchored in values while speaking of a better society for environment, people and economic transition.
5. Such a vision is instantiated through communication, interaction, and cultural exchange to continuously learn about the many dimensions of gender barriers, needs, and opportunities.

Through its focus on one of Europe’s leading manufacturing sectors, there are also important implications for industrial policy. As the textile and clothing sector begins to show signs of a new direction, it is quite often women who are leading the change. Greater recognition of the creativity and innovation that women are bringing to forward-thinking, alternative business models would allow to learn from these new approaches and apply them more broadly.

Challenges and recommendations

The main challenges lie in addressing infrastructural barriers such as education and financial support for women innovators, and in the roots of these issues, linked to the low degree of quadruple helix community engagement at the local level. Roadmaps should therefore be drawn up with the following goals:

1. Explore new models for active learning-based innovation, mixing academic thinking and conceptualization with practice- and project-based initiatives.
2. Stimulate co-creative approaches to business management, shifting the focus from individual status to collective talent.
3. In a similar fashion, adopt open and participatory processes, linked to action and innovation, to the definition of Gender and Equality Plans that truly reflect and support a collectively shared, forward-looking gender vision.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

The open-source and permanent-beta philosophy of the shemakes project has led to the definition of outputs that can readily feed into other initiatives while continuing to deliver impact.

- **The shemakes contribution to the TCBL Association**, strategically positioned as a value-based community of knowledge and practice now gaining a new awareness and capacity to address gender issues.
- **Shemakes Clubs** to promote and disseminate project outcomes as the future online place for community meetups and common strategic projects.
- **The shemakes' Open Toolkit**, fully documenting the agendas, processes, results, and reflections on the experience and impact of over 50 activities completed in the project.
- **Shemakes Role models**, with the network of Ambassadors and Gurus as the pivotal figures connecting and energising the whole community.
- **The shemakes identity**, making the shemakes vision clear, accessible, and supportive of community onboarding, and engagement and driving the network to achieve important and gratifying results.

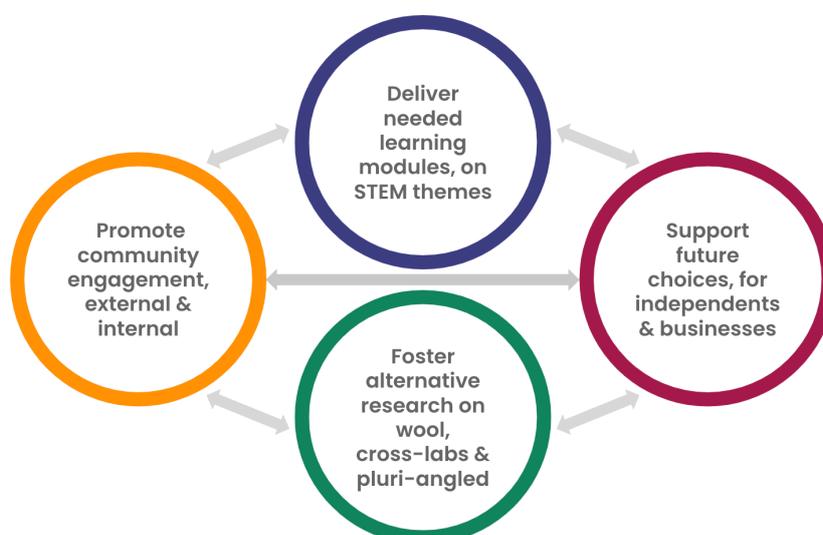
RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Objectives

The shemakes.eu project aimed to: a) blend the approaches of two leading innovation ecosystems in the textiles and clothing sector in order to b) promote, highlight and celebrate the leading role of women in innovation, with the goal of c) permanently re-shaping the opportunity structures in at least 16 European Member States and Associated Countries. The insights and recommendations in this document reflect the experience and results of this two-year project.

Methodology

The shemakes methodology activates an open, organically expanding, lab-based innovation network that provides four entry points designed to allow different labs and communities to address their immediate needs and from there iteratively develop journeys encompassing the full scope of active gender and innovation support.



PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Shemakes. Opportunity ecosystems bridging the gender gap (shemakes.eu)
COORDINATOR	Cedecs-TCBL SAS, Le Mans, France
CONSORTIUM	Flod Srl – FLOD (Prato, Italy) Institut d'Arquitectura Avancada de Catalunya – IAAC (Barcelona, Spain) Fundacion Telice Magnetic Anomaly - LEON (San Andres del Rabanedo, Spain) makesense – MAKE (Paris, France) Matrix Gmbh and Co KG – MATRIX (Düsseldorf, Germany) Onl'Fait – ONLF (Geneva, Switzerland) Atelierul REDU Srl – REDU (Iasi, Romania) Tavistock Institute for Human Relations – TIHR (London, United Kingdom) Stichting Waag Society – WAAG (Amsterdam, Netherlands)
FUNDING SCHEME	H2020-SwafS-2018-2020 Topic Swafs-26-2020.
DURATION	January 2021 – December 2022 (24 months)).
BUDGET	EU contribution: 1 495 031,25 €
WEBSITE	https://shemakes.eu/
FOR MORE INFORMATION	Frédérique Thureau, fthureau@toko-paris.com
FURTHER READING	<i>Shemakes Network</i> . shemakes.eu D 1.2. <i>Learning Paths: Final Toolkit</i> . shemakes.eu D 2.4. <i>Innovation Services: Final Toolkit</i> . shemakes.eu D 3.4. <i>Reputation Final Report</i> . shemakes.eu D 4.3. <i>Evaluation Final Report</i> . shemakes.eu D 5.2. <i>Communication and Dissemination Report</i> . shemakes.eu D 6.3. <i>Welcoming Differences, Key findings from the final Conference</i> , publication forthcoming.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 101006203

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