

New Silk Roads Annual Report 2021



Introduction by the Board

Different from what we all hoped, the year 2021 was fully absorbed by the pandemic and the consequences that affected all of us in different ways. Quite a challenge for all of us, for New Silk Roads not any less. We kept asking ourselves the question: how do we keep making a real difference while respecting our values of trust, connectedness and international solidarity in these challenging times for everyone?

In the Future Labs project these old silk route values make a beautiful connection with the present and the future. The new connections, collaborations and friendships following these events are inspiring. Also our other projects that will be explained in this annual report reflect these values and ongoing effort to help to see the world differently. In addition to the Future Labs, we like to highlight the BDSO Support and the Madar project. The BDSO Support was successfully continued last year in Tunisia, despite the challenging economic, (geo)political and societal context for all involved parties. It was very helpful that we could operate locally and therefore continue the training, tenders and other support. The Madar project matched a lot of startups through coaching and hybrid events. We are very much looking forward to the follow up!

On a more organizational level we are happy with our new visual identity and accompanying website that went live. We will continue to further professionalize our governance, but made great progress in formalizing processes and further optimizing our finance report systems.

For 2022 we are looking forward to expanding our current projects and developing new projects as well, of course. The Future Labs will have its kick-off in Egypt and continue to further explore stories and collaborations in Tunisia and the Netherlands. For the BDSO Support we are happy to be more with our feet on the ground in Egypt, a nice synergy with the Future Labs indeed, and also continue the trainings in Tunisia.

A warm thank-you to everyone who helped make 2021 such a good and inspiring year for New Silk Roads. We are truly grateful to our team of directors and consultants, all editors, artists, thinkers and all business and social partners for working closely together and for their enormous commitment and contribution to help to see the world differently.

March 2022,
Board of Stichting New Silk Roads
Dorothe Bongaerts-Stubbé
Boudewijn Niels

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GreenWorks

In collaboration with Hivos and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Futures Lab

From Buddhism to salt, the ideas and goods which traversed the silk roads of old forever changed the face of the known world. Today, these well-worn routes have been transformed into platforms and fiber optic cables which transport the commodities of the 21st century between continents in the blink of an eye. Alongside them, the oil and gas pipelines which fuel capitalist globalization have allowed for the unprecedented mobility of people and technologies but also harken a climate crisis spinning out of control. How do we navigate these new and old routes together to shape the future we want to live in?

New Silk Roads develops futures thinking programs which engage audiences to develop visions and scenarios for their preferred futures. Grounded in exploration over prediction, and possibility over certainty, New Silk Roads approaches futures thinking as an entry point to imagine what could happen, rather than trying to predict what will happen. These programs—



including Futures Labs, masterclasses, workshops, and online speaker series—equip participants with the skills, tools, and community to imagine novel futures which push beyond future tropes, “used futures,” and quick solution fixes.

2021 Futures Lab Theme

New Silk Roads believes that the ongoing climate crisis is equal parts environmental and social. Through this lens, the 2021 Tunis Futures Lab asks: **“What If the Future Were Rural? Imagining Just Food Systems in Tunisia.”** Using futures thinking, Lab participants will construct their own preferred scenarios for the future of food systems in Tunisia. The Lab will



imagine the future of food in Tunisia beyond “used” future tropes, transcending false human-nature dichotomies and resisting “quick solution” fixes of techno-optimism.

Highlights

- After fine tuning the curriculum for over one year, we successfully implemented the first full length Futures Lab in Tunisia.
- During the Futures Lab, three groups developed their very own, unique preferred future scenario. These scenarios will be collected in a book which will be presented to the participants in March 2022. Artist Hela Lamine, who has been a participant of the Lab, will make one illustration per scenario, representing the general thought of the scenario. These illustrations will be shared on social media as well.
- Sixteen carefully selected professionals participated, of which 12 were women. A group that represented a variety of sectors; government, civil society, commercial business, startup ecosystem and the creative industry (artists and bloggers). Furthermore, the age diversity and the different levels of professional experience made the group dynamic extraordinary. The oldest participant was seventy years old and the youngest twenty-six.
- Guest lectures: 1) Habib Ayeb on the history of modern food production in Tunisia and 2) Aesthetics of Futures Thinking.
- So far the Futures Lab resulted in several collaborations and new initiatives. Find the highlights listed below:

- A culinary event series between Doken and El Food Lab.
- Lab participants Leila Ben Gacem and Faten Abdelkafi collaborated to host a cooking and heritage workshop on forgotten culinary traditions in Tunisia. Faten Abdelkafi is president of the BeTounsi association and renowned influencer, where she shares Tunisian culinary heritage with her 43+ Instagram followers. This workshop was implemented under the FEELMEDINA, an



activity under the joint EU-Germany Ministry of Foreign Affairs « Promotion du Tourisme Durable » initiative.



- Educator Olfa Mahmoud connected two unemployed young women who had left school to Ftarchi, where they signed up for a free culinary training and job placement course.
- All participants expressed that they are now capable of identifying signals, transformational forces and are able to develop simple alternative future scenarios.

- The participants shared that their ability to make decisions and take actions that affect the future improved.

Key Stories

Story #1: The Key to the Future of Farming

Born in Tunisia, Nadia Jendoubi spent the early years of her life on her family's farm outside of Tunis before moving to Belgium with her family. An ecological designer with more than twenty years of experience working across Europe, Nadia returned to Tunisia in 2010 and founded [Najen Nature](#), a sustainable lifestyle and fashion brand dedicated to using natural ingredients and produced by artisans or small businesses in Europe and Tunisia. Since moving back to Tunisia, she has dreamed of revitalizing the family farm, which has largely remained unused since her family immigrated. But her parents were not convinced. During the Futures Lab, Nadia met other Tunisians working to create just food systems who she did know before and began to feel more



optimistic about the future of sustainable farming in Tunisia. She also visited [L'Heredium](#), a family-run eco-farm in Tebourba which has used permaculture to develop organic seeds, renourish the land, and establish a small retreat centre. Inspired by this visit, and the Futures Lab, Nadia called her father again to tell him everything that she was experiencing and her dream to transform the family's land into an ecofarm. This time, after a decade of trying to convince him, her father agreed to give her the key to the family farm and to begin pursuing her dream. Nadia shared this story with the Futures Lab participants, many of which quickly offered their support and encouragement.

Story #2: A Brighter Future



This is the story of a collaboration between three Futures Lab participants: Olfa Mahmoud, an educator from the rural town of Beni Khalled, Aida Ben Ammar, the president of Ftarchi, a social business offers culinary trainings to underserved women, and Leila Ben Gacem, a social entrepreneur and municipal council member in Beni Khalled. After the Futures Lab concluded, Olfa Mahmoud brought a group of teenagers from Beni Khalled to visit Dar Ben Gacem, a Tunis-based guest house managed by Leila Ben Gacem, to meet local artisans working in the Tunis Medina. All of these teenagers had dropped out of school and some of them could not even read – a rarity in Tunisia. While at Dar Ben Gacem, they were introduced to Ftarchi and learned about its culinary training and job placement for young women. Olfa later brought two young women from the group to register for Ftarchi’s training course and to act as a supplier for Ftarchi. As Leila described the situation, “Those young ladies had no hope in life. Now they want to cook and be part of Ftarchi!”

Pilot Future of Farming in Egypt

How can we imagine bold futures for organic farming in Egypt? Designed for a diverse group of experienced professionals, this one-day, intensive course was initiated to imagine radically different futures for farming in Egypt.

This intensive course utilized two interlinked approaches, gamification and scenario building to explore principles of futures thinking and work with participants to develop key futures thinking skills, such as signal identification, backcasting, strategic foresight, and scenario-building. The course also included scenario building sessions designed and facilitated by a team of creatives. These sessions deployed theatre and dramatic storytelling, choreography and embodied movement, and visual arts-based collective mapping, respectively, to unlock imaginative processes and collectively explore a range of preferred, possible futures for food production in Egypt. This course has been organised in partnership with [Rdna](#) and [KMT House](#).

BDSO Support Trajectory

Introduction and highlights

The Green Works programme (2020-2023), is committed to 1) supports employability hubs to train young people (**upskilling**) and match them to vacancies (**matching**) in the job markets; and 2) supports BDSOs to scale startups so that these startups create more jobs (**scaling**).

Over the course of three years New Silk Roads expects to support **12-15 local BDSOs and employability hubs** (hereafter BDSOs). Over the last 1.5 years New Silk Roads has supported 9 BDSOs and raised over EUR 1.3 million. These BDSOs received tailored capacity support from a (senior) fundraising consultant. Exact support was determined in coordination with BDSO. New Silk Roads has committed to deliver the following services:

- Proposal development (in other words: writing a grant application together with staff members of the BDSO on behalf of the BDSO)
- Partnership building (in other words: helping the BDSO find regional and European partners and jointly apply for funding in a consortium)
- Intensive fundraising coaching trajectory for dedicated staff member(s). Aim is for this staff member to acquire the relevant skills of the fundraising consultant to be able to develop competitive proposals.

Deliverables 2021

- 7 BDSOs supported
- 11 applications were submitted
- 2 pending applications
- 2 successful applications
- Funds raised: EUR 778,000
- 2 partnership formed between local and international BDSOs
- Fundraising training conducted with 6 team members of Flat6Labs in July-Aug 2021
- In total EUR 1.3 million was raised for three partners. The programmes are expected to train 1630 young people, incubate/accelerate 140 startups and generate direct jobs for 250 youth.

Madar

[Madar Innovation](#) is a 24-month project implemented by Yunus Social Business Tunisia (Impact Partner), in partnership with New Silk Roads. The project is funded by the European Union and Expertise France, and falls within the broader INNOVI programme.

The overall objective of Madar Innovation is to contribute to the strengthening of a dynamic, resilient and innovative entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tunisia. This will be done through:

- Strengthening the activities and services of support structures for the creation, development and acceleration of innovative companies and Tunisian startups.
- Strengthening the activities and services of financing and investment actors for the creation, development and acceleration of innovative companies and Tunisian startups.
- Dissemination of structures and programmes throughout the territory, particularly in the interior governorates.
- Strengthening partnerships and connections between Tunisian and international ecosystems through benefits and exchanges of good practices, access to new resources and collaboration opportunities.

Matchmaking activities 2021

- Needs assessment startups, survey and personal interviews with startups
- Ready for investment training by investor and trainer Keith Wallace
- Coaching sessions by Keith Wallace
- Impactfest Meetup: Add value to the Dutch market
- Doing business in the Netherlands event
- 33 personal matches made based on needs startups

Fundraising activities 2021

BDSO trajectory

New Silk Roads assisted Impact Partner in selecting 3 advanced local BDSOs under Madar: INCO/Minassa Tunisia, Connect Innov, and Next Women. NewSilkRoads delivered a fundraising training cycle for these organisations from May to June 2021 and conducted a fundraising needs analysis. Based on this analysis we organised tailor-made fundraising support with immediate success. In 2021 we managed to raise over EUR 1.5 million on behalf of INCO/Minassa to support their incubation/acceleration in Tunisia and Ivory Coast. We also raised EUR 300,000 for Connect Innov to support their health acceleration trajectory in Tunisia. Currently three more applications are still under development. We hope to raise even more for these partners in 2022.

Local BDSO and startup fundraising support

NewSilkRoads conducted two training sessions for BDSOs from medium-sized cities in Tunisia as well as 10 social enterprises directly supported by Impact Partner. Four startups were selected for individual support. Three developed concept notes and one developed their theory of change. One of the startups, Izoguern, raised EUR 9000 from a Tourism Recovery Programme.

Google News Initiative: Roots

Introduction

Nawaat's business plan aspires to substantially transform regional digital news consumption behaviors, starting in Tunisia.

An innovative approach to monetizing Nawaat's audience base underlined by robust privacy protections for paid subscribers. Nawaat's business model would constitute the first online loyalty payment system for digital media in Tunisia. This project constitutes 1) setting up a crowdfunding account targeting Nawaat audiences; 2) offering select online paid services for other specific audiences; and 3) upgrading Nawaat's existing web services to increase reader engagement. The project further aspires to transform regional digital news consumption behaviors by fostering a culture of paying for quality journalism, starting in Tunisia.

New Silk Roads will support Nawaat with the transformation plan and mapping of inspiring business models.

Vertical Atlas

Introduction

Vertical Atlas is a publication that changes the ways in which the geopolitics of technology are discussed today. The Atlas is being made by a group of 60 international designers, artists and thinkers from a broad range of disciplines spanning over countries from all continents.

The digital reality we find ourselves in is increasingly complex. Geographical maps only yield limited agency as tools for navigating this reality. They do not account for new folded, fractal borders that are created in cyberspace and do not show how national digital borders materialize at odd places in the world such as cobalt mines in Congo, that are owned by Chinese state run companies, or Amazon-owned cloud servers located in Singapore. At the same time, states are increasingly morphing into non-local platforms (like-E-stonia) and

cloud platforms themselves are taking over traditional roles of the state, such as cartography (Google) and identification (Facebook, Google). If maps are tools to aid in navigation, new kinds of mappings are needed. These mappings must account for current global technological realities as well as alternative technological and cultural histories, they must explore multiple perspectives that embrace different meanings in different zones of the world. Vertical Atlas emphasizes the need for alternative and accessible contemporary mappings. Humans require relatable interfaces that trigger more than only their cognitive capacities. Here, the merging of language, art and design can provide us with approaches and leads that aim to achieve just that.

Highlights

- Collaborating with a diverse team of nine editors, with 60 creatives from all over the world (24 countries) has been a challenge, but most of all an achievement we are very proud of. Especially in times of the global pandemic. The Atlas consists of 35 visual and 26 text contributions. The creatives include designers, change makers, scientists and artists, of which over 50% are female.
- The Vertical Atlas is an unique book, including a variety of maps and commissions ranging from a watercolour painting (Dan Zhou) till a detailed infographic about a political issue in Brazil (Pablo de Soto) at the other end of the spectrum.
- As Hannah Adlide from the editorial team put into words “First you see everyone's proposals and along the process you start believing it is really becoming a book, not just a Google Drive folder”. After months of hard work, searching for artists, editing contributions and putting everything together, everyone is very much looking forward to the final Vertical Atlas, expected early 2022.

Consultancy activities

As in previous years New Silk Roads has conducted various fundraising and programme development consultancy activities. In 2021 these included:

- Co-developing a proposal for the 1st online loyalty-based payment system for digital media in Tunisia with Tunisian media organisation Nawaat for the Google News Initiative (ultimately successful. See the Roots project above for relevant activities);
- Assisting Nile Journeys in developing a new programme for the Templeton Foundation focusing on building character and community along the countries of the Nile (unsuccessful);
- Co-developing a proposal aimed at amplifying voices working towards climate justice in Tunisia with Tunisian media organisation Nawaat for the Voices for Climate Justice Initiative (ultimately successful. Nawaat became the sole implementer of this project).

Looking ahead to 2022

Existing programmes

New Silk Roads expects to wrap up its Madar project in July 2022 and its Roots project in September 2022. Furthermore, we expect to launch our second fully fledged Future Thinking School in Egypt in the first half of 2022. Finally, our BDSO fundraising trajectory is expected to continue and expand to support a number of additional BDSOs in Tunisia and Egypt and expand to Algeria over the course of 2022.

Consultancy activities and programme development

New Silk Roads expects to continue its fundraising and programme development activities with Nawaat and is looking to develop a similar partnership with The Arab Digital Expression Foundation (ADEF) in Egypt. New Silk Roads will also look to find partner organisations in Tunisia and Egypt to partner with for the expected upcoming round of the Youth Challenge Fund run by Palladium.