

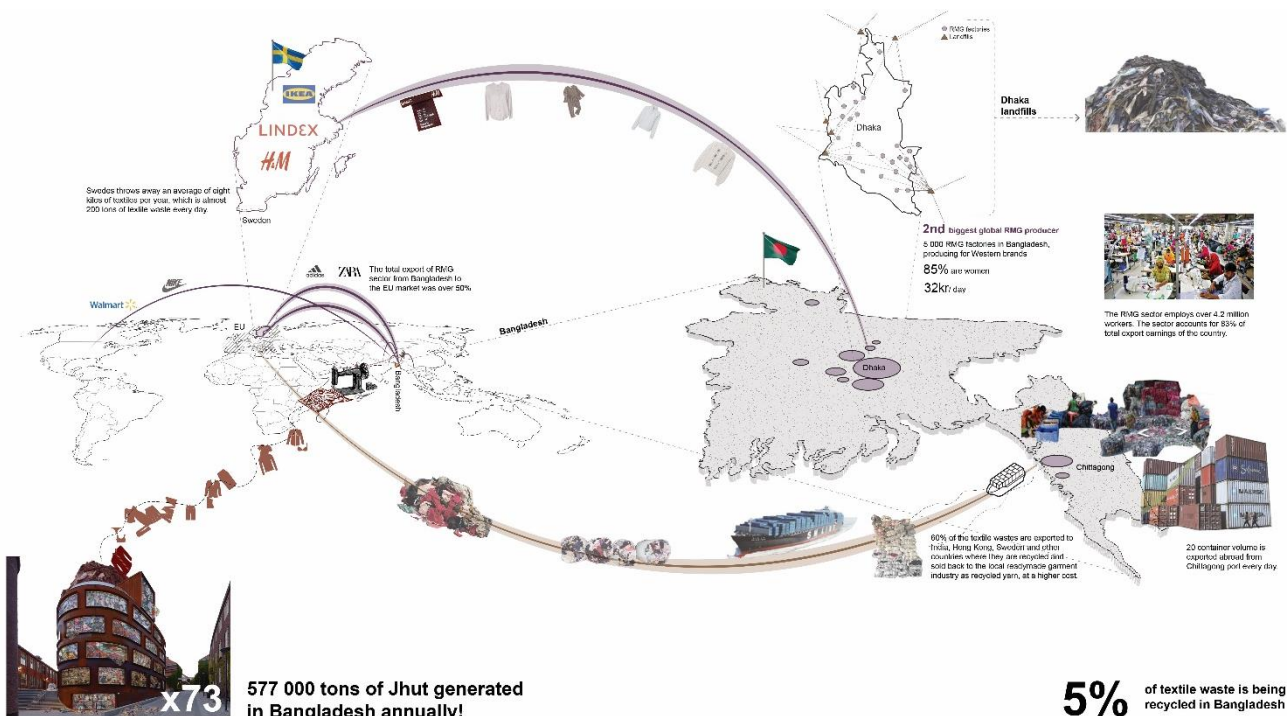


# (re)Made in Bangladesh, exploring innovative practices of textile waste recycling

## Before departure

The KTH FS grant provided the perfect opportunity to gain a situated knowledge of our topic and site. Through a conversation with my thesis partner, Shimanto Goswami, he raised the question “Do you know where your shirt is made?”. To my surprise the shirt I bought at H&M was made in Bangladesh, his home country. Bangladesh is the world’s second largest readymade garments (RMG) producer. This sparked an interest in the garments industry and its relationship to urban planning, design and globalisation. Through initial desktop study we found two articles about a specific site in Bangladesh that recycles pre-consumer textile waste into various products. This was unique in a landscape where less than 5% of textile waste is recycled in Bangladesh. However, there was minimal research on the site and topic online. Thus, we developed a research proposal for the KTH FS to bridge this knowledge gap and surface new findings. The research project looks at a very specific site, Shaolil Bazar, and its entanglements in the large global network of the readymade garments (RMG). Our expectations of the FS were to unpack and gain valuable insights from these innovative practices at the selected site of focus as well as gain a broader understanding of the textile recycling landscape in Bangladesh.

Regarding preparation for the FS we developed our project plan and reached out to the various actors we wanted to engage with once in Bangladesh. We spent time sending out numerous emails to setup meetings and site visits prior to our arrival. Regarding visa, I spoke to the Bangladesh Embassy in Stockholm who informed me of the required documents and process involved. I had to apply for a research visa which required a letter from KTH as well as a letter of invitation from Bangladesh. Fortunately, one of our local contacts is a professor at a university in Dhaka who was able to provide the letter of invitation. It took less than two weeks for the visa to be approved.



## Upon arrival

Before we arrived, we had already setup meetings with actors thus we hit the ground running and started the engagements within a few days of arrival. At the same time, we contacted the actors that had not previously replied to our emails. We also used the snowballing method from the engagement we had. The FS started on January 29 and ended on March 27 so we spent just more than 8 weeks in Bangladesh. This allowed us a good amount of time to be flexible in our arrangements and enabled us to have in depth investigations the specific site. Our engagements were well distributed across the whole country, so it allowed for days to travel between cities. The fieldwork was curated by ourselves and thus there was no formal reception. However, each actor we visited was extremely accommodating who were willing to share their insights of the trade and often treated us to coffee/tea, snacks and sometimes lunch. The engagements mostly happened through on-site meetings and site visits with the respective actors.

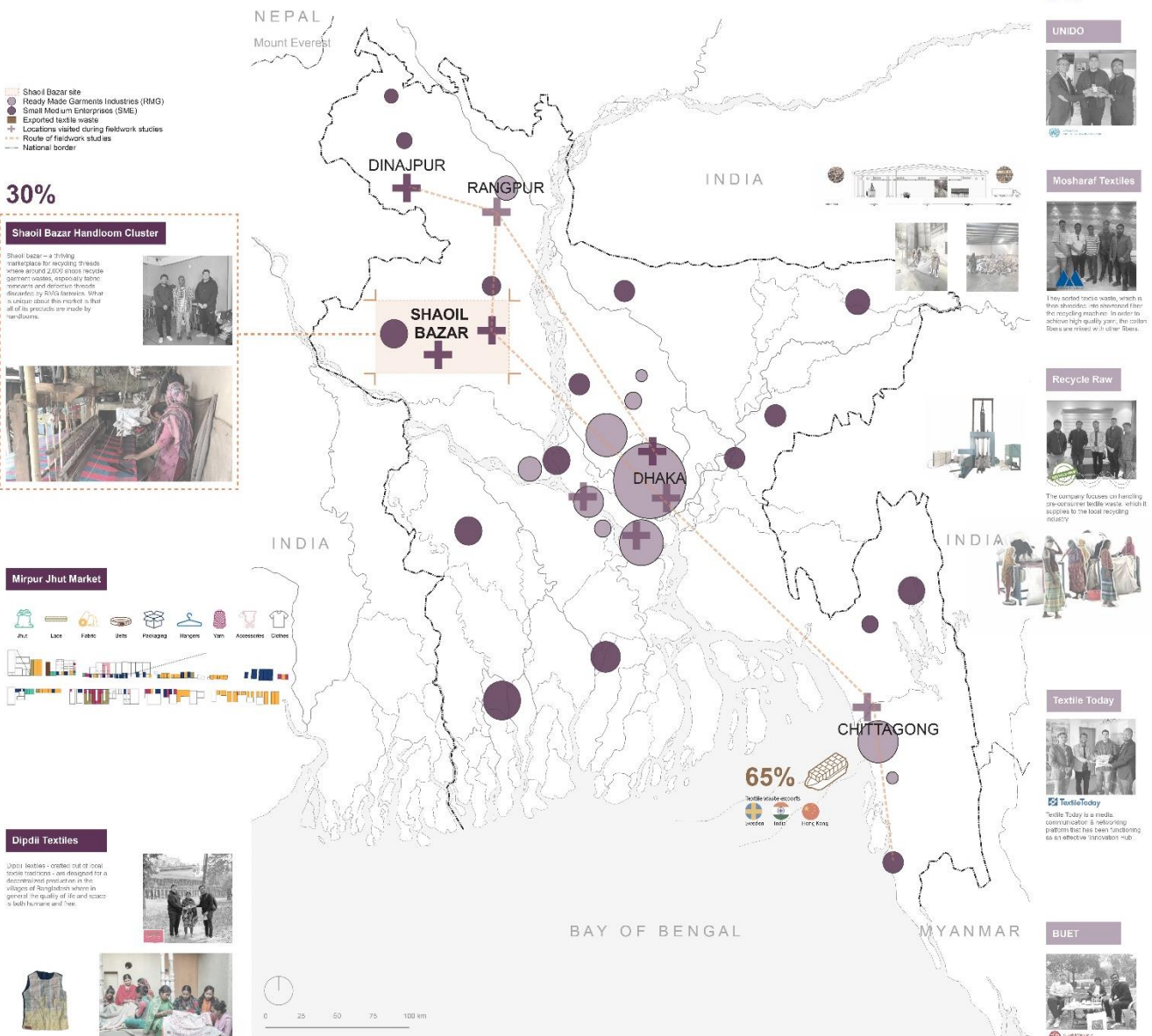
### How are our clothes made?



“Jhut”  
is pre-consumer fabric waste clippings



### Engaging with Jhut Recycling Actors





## Financials

Bangladesh is considerably less expensive than Sweden. Fortunately, our project was funded by both the KTH FS Grant and the Karl Engver's Foundation from which we were able to support us financially. Without which it would have not been possible. Food and groceries were by far cheaper than Stockholm. Accommodation can be expensive depending on your preferences. We travelled a fair bit across the country so I would recommend curating the routes so that is more efficient and cost effective. To save money on FS I would recommend doing a detailed budget and continuously update it as the time progresses. The biggest expensive as expected was the return ticket flight which was around 10 000sek.

## Accommodation

I did my FS with my thesis partner who is from Bangladesh thus this made finding accommodation much easier. For certain parts of the trip, we stayed with his family. This was a great experience to receive a more authentic home stay, which very much helped me understand the culture, food and ways of life/ customs. other than that, we used local accommodation booking sites. Calling the accommodation provider directly served best to receive a response and a booking. The housing conditions was good and cost effective. The conditions and cost depend greatly on preferences.



## Project

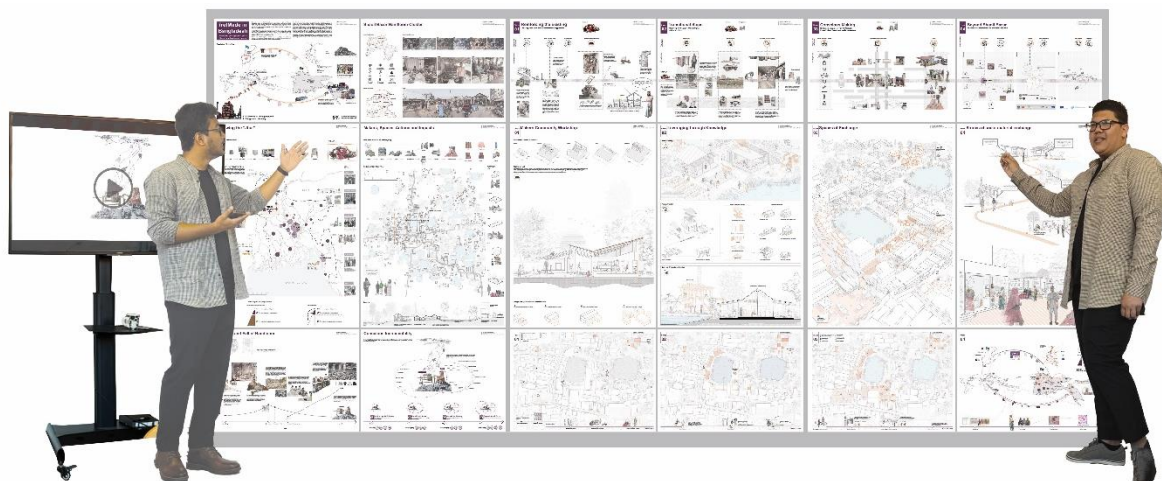
The project aims to investigate and understand the practices of textile waste recycling in Shaoil Bazar, Bangladesh, and how these practices can inform conscious incremental upgrading of the village. The purpose of the project is multifaceted:

**Knowledge Generation:** The primary goal is to bridge the knowledge gap regarding the operations and processes of textile waste recycling in Shaoil Bazar. By conducting in-depth research, including ethnographic studies and interviews, the project seeks to uncover the intricate dynamics of this informal industry. **Infrastructure Enhancement:** Through understanding local practices of textile waste recycling, the project aims to provide insights into how urban infrastructure can be upgraded to support sustainable development in Shaoil Bazar and similar villages. **Policy Informing:** to advocate for policies that promote sustainable practices in the textile industry and support the livelihoods of those involved in recycling. **Community Empowerment:** The project also seeks to empower local communities by involving them in the research process, listening to their perspectives, and understanding their needs and challenges. By engaging with stakeholders at various levels, the project aims to ensure that any proposed interventions are inclusive, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the aspirations of the community. **Capacity Building:** Additionally, the project may contribute to capacity building efforts by providing training or resources to local actors involved in textile waste recycling. This could include sharing best practices, providing technical assistance, or facilitating knowledge exchange between different stakeholders. Overall, the project's purpose is to contribute to the sustainable development of Shaoil Bazar by leveraging local knowledge and practices, informing policy and infrastructure improvements, and empowering the community to take ownership of their development processes.

I wouldn't say there was any typical day during the FS, one always needed to have a plan and be ready to change and adapt on the spot. For example, in Dhaka we did a lot of interviews at offices or garment factories thus we spent most of the day commuting to and from the location and spent about 2-3 hours engaging with the actors. This could have been in the office, a walk around the factory or a mixture of both. On our specific site in Shaoil Bazar we travelled in the early morning and spent most of the day on the site. We organically wandered around the site and met local community members and were invited to visit various houses, workshops, shops and offices. This was unpredictable and organic in its discovery and method. Other than that, days were spent at home or at a coffee shop synthesizing and evaluating the research and data collected to present online for supervisor at KTH.

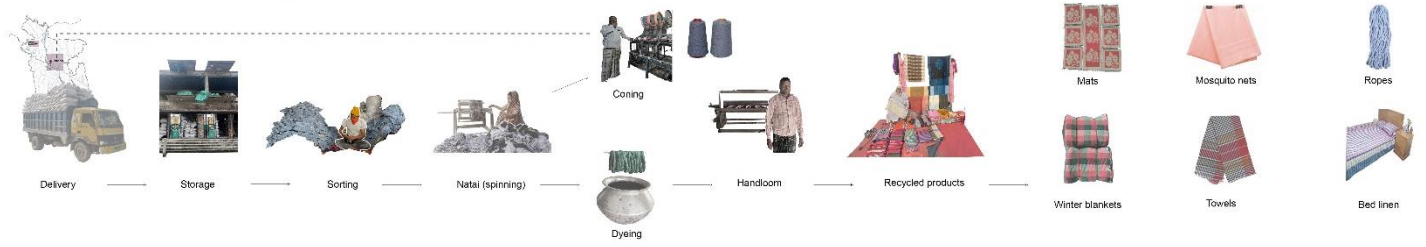
We had two local contacts. One at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology who provided valuable academic insights into the topics and research which helped us strengthen our research proposal before engaging with the various actors. Our other local contact was the journalist who wrote an article about our study area. She provided great insight into the site itself and what to expect. As well as logistics assistance as to how to travel there daily, accommodation options nearby and a contact of local business owner on our site.

We recently presented our findings and propositional solution in the form of an urban planning and design project. The external jury found the topic unique and interesting, and we were given an honourable mention for the thesis. Our aim now is to disseminate the project to the various stakeholders we engaged with during the FS as well other actors in Sweden to allow the idea to travel.





Innovative practices of Jhut recycling





## Country

I could say almost everything is the opposite to Sweden from daily commuting, grocery shopping and lifestyle. For me, as I have travelled to similar contexts before, and I am from South Africa it was not a complete shock but for sure some differences. Major things are the amount of people and so many things happening at the same time. Organised chaos which is very interesting. After long days of interviews and discussions it can be overwhelming. Transport options available was also one of the shocks and unique characteristics of Bangladesh. At one point we calculated that we took more than 10 different modes of transportation. The working days and weekends are different. Because it's a majority Muslim country, Friday is the start of the weekend, which rolls over to Saturday, and thus the new week starts on Sunday. We also got to experience Eid, which was a unique experience to see how most of the food stores are closed during the day, if they were open, they would be hidden behind a serious of fabrics. At the time to break one's fast, the city would spring to life again, and the variety of snacks and food would flood the streets. Another unique thing was the clothing, out of respect one was recommended to wear a long pants that goes over the knees, which could be a challenge at times in a very hot and humid city.

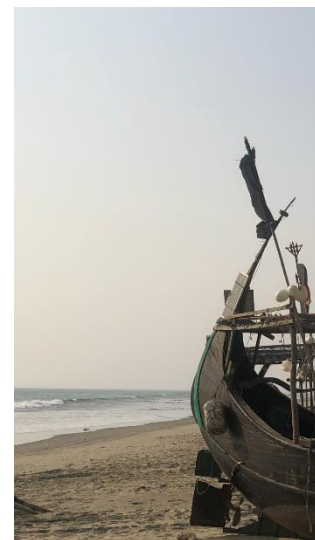


## Leisure and social activities

Allow time to relax during the two months. In the city there was not a lot of public open space so be aware of this if you like green nature spaces. There are opportunities to access this but you usually have to travel to public parks. There is a big social culture of gathering at restaurants to chat and relax over a meal or coffee. We engaged in these social dinners to take a break from the FS and for me to meet my colleague's friends and family. There is also a big social culture around cha (tea) stalls which is organic and informal on the street side. This is wonderful for a quick break and to engage with locals.

We spent one week at a popular tourist beach resort area at the end of our stay. So that was great as a reward for all the intense FS work and allowed us time to reflect on the research. The name of the beach city is called Cox's Bazar which is longest beach in the world. The city had a much slower pace and atmosphere from the previous places we stayed, it was well located on the beach which had amazing sea food restaurants. We travelled a bit further south to gain a different experience, where we lived in a timber hut in the middle of nature.

Sports usually happened in the street or in park areas and informally. There was a lot of cricket and football being played. It is easily accessible to be a part of if you choose to engage. We didn't partake in any formal or arranged sporting activities during our time. Luckily, I went with a Bangladesh with my thesis partner who is from Bangladesh thus it was easy to engage with his friends and families in the respective cities. This was great to get a different perspective and meet people.





## Sustainability

During our field studies, we prioritized sustainable travel methods to minimize environmental impact. Utilizing public transportation, reduced carbon emissions compared to individual vehicle use. Additionally, we opted for eco-friendly accommodations and supported local businesses to contribute positively to the local economy. Incorporating sustainable practices into our everyday lives was essential. We reduced single-use plastic consumption by carrying reusable water bottles and shopping bags. Moreover, we embraced energy-saving habits, such as turning off lights and electronics when not in use and supported local markets to reduce food miles and promote sustainable agriculture.

Our research project aligned to and contributed to several SDGs, primarily SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production. By addressing issues related to urban infrastructure, waste management, and sustainable production and consumption, we aim to promote inclusive and environmentally sustainable development in Bangladesh. Our research findings and proposed interventions align with the targets of these SDGs, fostering a more resilient and equitable society while mitigating environmental degradation.

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities (Target 11.1 ‘By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums’). The research aimed to collect data to understand the existing state of the infrastructure to deduce what are the most pressing infrastructure provisions needed for the study area. In conjunction with engagements with public officials and regional planning departments, it will help to inform policy for sustainable settlement development.

SDG12: Responsible Consumption and Production (Target 12.2 ‘By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling, and reuse’). The research aimed to understand the existing processes and operations of textile thread recycling. Synthesising its positive and negative attributes to the RMG industry, the socio-environmental impacts, and its relationship to the built environment.





### Other recommendations and observations

In Bangladesh I would recommend calling actors directly rather than emailing, as the phone call is the easiest mode of communication and thus people responded quicker. Make sure to plan the 8 weeks well as the time goes by faster than you expect. Have a few days in between to relax and experience the country beyond the research project itself. If you plan to travel to various cities, make sure to allow for time for commuting and rest thereafter as this can become tiring after long bus trips. Keep track of your budget and allow for gifts to take home. We also bought gifts from the KTH store for the actors we engaged with, which was well accepted. If you are not familiar with research ethics and methods, I would be sure to do some online courses or watch online videos to familiarise yourself with fieldwork research as this will be helpful while in the field.

In summary, the fieldwork studies provided a great opportunity to engage directly with the actors through on the ground research methods to capture situated perspectives. A truly unique research experience informed by on the site engagements which could not have been possible through a desktop study. Furthermore, the embodied experience in Bangladesh with its rich culture and history was a great personal experience. Thus, I would like to send my sincere gratitude to KTH Fieldwork Studies Grant for supporting the research project financially, without which would have not been possible. Without a doubt the experience has changed my personal perspectives and contributed to a research gap in the industry which has a great significance to Sweden as it produces many of its garments in Bangladesh.







 Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology



 TextileToday

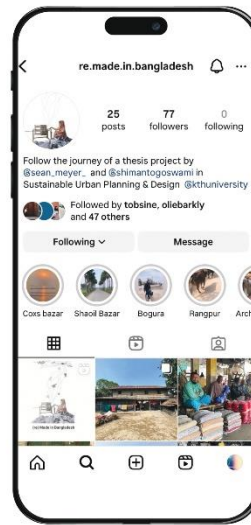


# Instagram Account

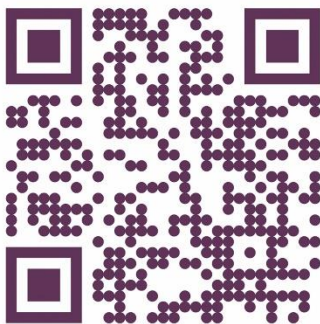


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# Video



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-hThEg67Ns>

