

Hey consumer, awake your sleeping capital!

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A favorite pair of pants that don't fit anymore, a dress bought two years ago for a friend's wedding, a sale bargain you barely used. Almost everyone of us has some clothes that are hiding in our closets not being used. The CEO of Emmy Clothing Company, Timo Huhtamäki, calls these clothes sleeping capital. Getting this sleeping capital into circulation would benefit both the economy and environment, not to mention the limited storage space of ours. According to the report [Textile flows in Finland 2019](#), Finnish households consumed approximately 9,4 kilos of new textiles per person in 2019. 67 % of new textiles were imported. In the same year, over 85 million kilos of end-of-life textiles were collected, of which approximately 60 % ended up in incineration.

According to [the report by Sitra](#), the global production and consumption of clothes is predicted to triple from the current situation by 2050. While the consumption of clothes increases, individual pieces of clothes get less and less use. Putting unnecessary clothes into circulation more often would reduce the consumption of new clothes. Profits from the sales of second-hand clothes would stay in Finland, whereas the sales revenue of new clothes flows mainly across country borders. At the same time, the environmental impacts of the consumption of clothes would decrease. The share of the textile industry in the global climate emissions varies between 4 to 10 %, but and the share is projected to rise to more than a quarter of emissions by 2050.

[Based on the report by the Finnish Commerce Federation](#), the value of the circular trade was estimated to be approximately 895 million euros, which mostly consist of the trade between consumers. The circular trade also includes second-hand trade between companies and consumers, and the outlet sales of stores. Finland ranked third after Switzerland and United Kingdom in a comparison of purchase of second-hand products, as 60 % of the Finnish respondents answered they had bought second-hand products during the previous year. Clothes were the most popular category of the second-hand products being bought. Women and respondents under 40 were the most eager to report having bought second-hand. [According to a survey ordered by the Federation of Finnish Special Commodity Trade ETU](#), the importance of owning products still seems to be quite strong as only 16 % of respondents were ready to rent clothes either short or long term.

"However, buying second-hand clothes is not enough to make our current patterns of consumption sustainable. We also must consume less and buy even second-hand clothes only out of necessity."

The second-hand trade is part of the circular economy, where a greater and greater share of the conventional "take-make-waste" consumption pattern is tried to be replaced with more sustainable and responsible consumption practices. In the case of producing and consuming clothes, this means producing more durable clothes, adding more times of use per piece of clothing, and keeping the clothes in circulation longer than they now are. The second-hand trade is an easy way to move along towards consuming in accordance with circular economy. You can sell clothes, that have become useless, in flea markets or on sales platforms like [Tori.fi](#), or you can take your unnecessary clothes to a company specialized in resale or donate them later to be sold in a recycling centre. Visiting second-hand shops is easy, especially in the bigger cities, for more and more stores have been opened in the city centres and shopping centres. Moreover, there are collection points for clothes at department stores, and some stores also provide resale services for their own brands.

However, buying second-hand clothes is not enough to make our current consumption patterns sustainable. We must also consume less and buy second-hand clothes only out of necessity. [According to a study made by Hot or Cool Institute](#), reducing the consumption of new clothes is the most efficient way to decrease the climate emissions of the textile industry. The second biggest emissions reductions are achieved by increasing the times of use for clothes, whereas decreasing the washing times of textiles, responsible recycling, and buying second-hand clothes had a clearly minor effect on the emissions. Because the growth in the sales of second-hand clothes lowers the consumption of new clothes and increases the times of use for clothes, it also has indirect effects on the emissions.

Circular economy, sustainability, and responsibility are all important topics in the consumption of clothes. The topics are also intertwined, and [in the study by Federation of Finnish Special Commodity Trade ETU](#), consumers stated, that above all, a responsible product is one that stays in use for a long time. Environmentally friendly materials and the recyclability of the products were also amongst the five most mentioned qualities, both of which are essential parts of the circular economy. Over third of the respondents of the study told they take responsibility into account often or always when making a purchase decision, and most respondents said they sometimes pay attention to responsibility. One third of the respondents were ready to pay more for responsibly produced products, but the majority thought they would pay just a little extra, which meant approximately 10 % higher price compared to other products.

We don't automatically become responsible consumers by moving from consuming new clothes to buying second-hand, if we don't at the same time change our consumption patterns to more responsible ones. Even second-hand clothes are being bought spontaneously and in a bargain-seeking way, and what is more, not all clothes bought as second-hand end up in use. Product returns are quite common in second-hand online shopping. The low prices at second-hand stores can tempt us to buy unnecessary products, and consumption aimed at second-hand clothes isn't necessarily found irresponsible. A sustainable future requires acts from all of us. To conclude, let's awake the clothes sleeping in our closets, let's purchase also second-hand clothes responsibly and out of necessity, and let's make sure we remember to use all of our clothes!

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