

The reuse of textiles has enormous potential - the challenge is to make it easy, attractive and accessible

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The reuse of textiles is a form of consumption that is constantly increasing in popularity and has many positive effects. However, there are still challenges associated with the reuse of textiles, for example problems related to time use or availability. Often, the consumer chooses the easiest and fastest way to get rid of unnecessary textiles or buying new ones.

The textile industry produces increasing amounts of waste, as the consumption of textiles only increases, and at the same time valuable resources and materials are wasted (Arnould ym. 2023, 35). Textile waste can primarily be reduced if consumers purchase a reasonable amount of clothing and other textiles and keep them in circulation for as long as possible.

Extending the service life of textiles has been found to be the most direct way to solve the textile industry's environmental problems. As textiles circulate for as long as possible, buying new ones decreases. (Arnould ym. 2023, 35.) The reuse of textiles means that the product or part of the product is used again for the same purpose for which it was originally designed (Suomen tekstiili ja muoti n.d).

Currently, only about two percent of consumer goods are reused, although according to an international study, the potential is 10–20 percent or even 50 percent, depending on the product. Up to 66 percent of clothes lie unused in wardrobes. Reuse and the related potential have not been considered sufficiently in social development. In waste management, much more has been invested in utilizing energy and organizing the recycling of materials. (Circwaste 2022.)

The multiple benefits of reuse

In addition to environmental issues, reuse offers other positive effects too. It gives tools to eliminate poverty and inequality, for many less well-off households, reuse may be a significant factor in terms of economy and livelihood. Necessary items can be purchased at a significantly lower price than new. (Circwaste 2022.)

Recycling also provides plenty of jobs. According to RREUSE, a network of European re-use operators, re-use creates 70 jobs per 1000 tonnes of material. There are many types of jobs, such as low-threshold jobs as well as jobs that require a high level of expertise and know-how. Among other things, it is possible for the long-term unemployed to get a job in reuse. In Finland, reuse and recycling are one of the most significant fields in which you can find employment with the help of supported employment. (Circwaste 2022.)

Slowdowns and challenges of increasing reuse

In gathering data for a thesis ([find the thesis here](#)), a survey was conducted regarding the reuse of textiles, and it brought out various reflections on the challenges and successes related to reuse of textiles. Reusing textiles is a part of almost every Finn's life, at least in some way. For some, it means selling unnecessary textiles, for some it means giving textiles to a charity or buying used ones at a flea market.

Based on the survey results, it was possible to conclude that consumers are driven by the ease of reusing textiles. Textiles are taken to where it is easiest to take them and what is most easily available. The same applies to buying used clothes, i.e. we buy where they are easiest to find. Reuse could therefore be increased best by making the services easily available to consumers, such as in physical shops or shopping centres.

According to the survey, certain types of clothing, such as party wear, are rarely purchased, and the reason may be that their availability is limited or hard to identify. It is difficult to know which store to go to find a party dress that suits you and is still the right size. It's easier to go to a traditional store where you know you'll find what you're looking for. Part of the reason for choosing the easiest option is probably the challenges of time management. Selling used and buying new takes time, and facilitating this and discussing the theme are important measures to increase the reuse of textiles.

Based on the survey, selling and donating are more popular than buying used. In an ideal situation, these would be in balance, but currently, judging by the results of the survey, products are sold and donated in much larger quantities than there are buyers for the products. This creates imbalance in the market.

Charitable donations are a popular way to put clothes into circulation. One of the reasons for the popularity of charities is their accessibility and ease of use. The service is available to everyone and there are drop-off points all over Finland. This could also be used as a model in other reuse services. By improving accessibility and the ease of use, the load of clothes can be distributed more evenly between different services.

Reuse should be supported and facilitated as far as possible in the future. It can best be implemented by making services easier and improving accessibility. The contribution of consumers to the increase in reuse is key. By increasing awareness and attracting consumers to reuse, both in the field of selling and buying, we get the full benefit of reuse.

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