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# A Critical Perspective on Second-hand Clothing

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A close-up photograph of a green, textured knitted sweater. A light brown cardboard tag is attached to a dark brown strap. The tag is partially visible at the top and bottom of the frame. The background is the green fabric of the sweater.

1. Is second-hand automatically circular?

2. What opportunities do consumers have to consume textiles responsibly?

COTTON

Is second-hand automatically a  
*sustainable* and *responsible* business  
model, which supports *circular*  
*economy?*



How do we  
interpret  
**Circular  
Economy?**

Second-hand as  
**extra revenue?**  
Or a real  
**alternative?**


What should it  
mean from a  
**business**  
perspective?

# Circular Economy as an Opportunity for Business Growth




- Circular economy can support **growth** and **sustainability** simultaneously.
- **Waste** as untapped **profit** and **business opportunity**.
- Interpretation **most favored** by for-profit businesses and used to **entice** for-profit businesses.

# Second-hand clothing as CE: Re-using Resources



"The environmental impact of reusing textiles is 70 times lower (*EuRIC, 2023*)."



Naturally part of circular economy, we already have it in play (*Kasavan et al. 2021*).



Re-using is *familiar* and used to be part of our culture (*Fletcher, and Tham, 2019*).

# Second-hand clothing as CE: Value Shift



Second-hand waste as capital value in waiting (*Gidwani, 2018*).



Economic value is often used as a form of 'value' measurement.



Alters how consumers see and treat clothes, long-term over short-term thinking.

# Second-hand clothing as CE: Consumer Centric



Second-hand as a consumer centric approach to sustainability (*Sheth et al, 2011*).



Inclusive sustainability. Has economic benefits for consumers, as consumers and sellers.




It supports a transition towards a new normal (*Sven Kevin van Langen et al, 2023*).



# Take-away points:

- ❖ Second-hand is 'easy', familiar and 'natural' circularity.
- ❖ It promotes 'value' in waste (or not seeing anything as waste per se).
- ❖ Second-hand is inclusive and promotes consumer centric approaches.
- ❖ Can act as a transition towards circular-economy.



Second-hand can act as a transition towards circular-economy.

## Circular Economy as altering Consumption and Production Habits.



- Profit driven Circular Economy as **‘business as usual.’**
- Second-hand as added **revenue** as opposed to an **alternative.**
- Sustainability requires **re-evaluation** of consumption & production behaviour, and **‘needs.’**

# Is second-hand clothing altering ideas of 'need'?



Market based economy vs Consumer Capitalist economy.



Economic benefit of second-hand drives increased consumption.



Second-hand as an extra not an alternative

# Second-hand as Slow Fashion?



Sustainable fashion industry needs to operate by 'slow principles'



Voluntary modesty, rejecting the unnecessary and meaningful values  
*(Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017)*



Second-hand can drive impulse purchases and imperfect purchases.

# Second-hand motivated by a profitability hype?



Expectations of both organisations and consumers need to be altered.



Will second-hand be abandoned if it loses its profit incentive?



Waste needs to be more than profit.



# Take-away points:

- ❖ Second-hand as a goal to grow and expand will continue to fuel unsustainability.
- ❖ Second-hand needs to be applied through principles of 'slow fashion.'
- ❖ Second-hand value as more than 'profit.'
- ❖ Re-evaluating 'needs' and 'expectations' is a must.



Second-hand  
needs to be an  
intentional  
alternative.



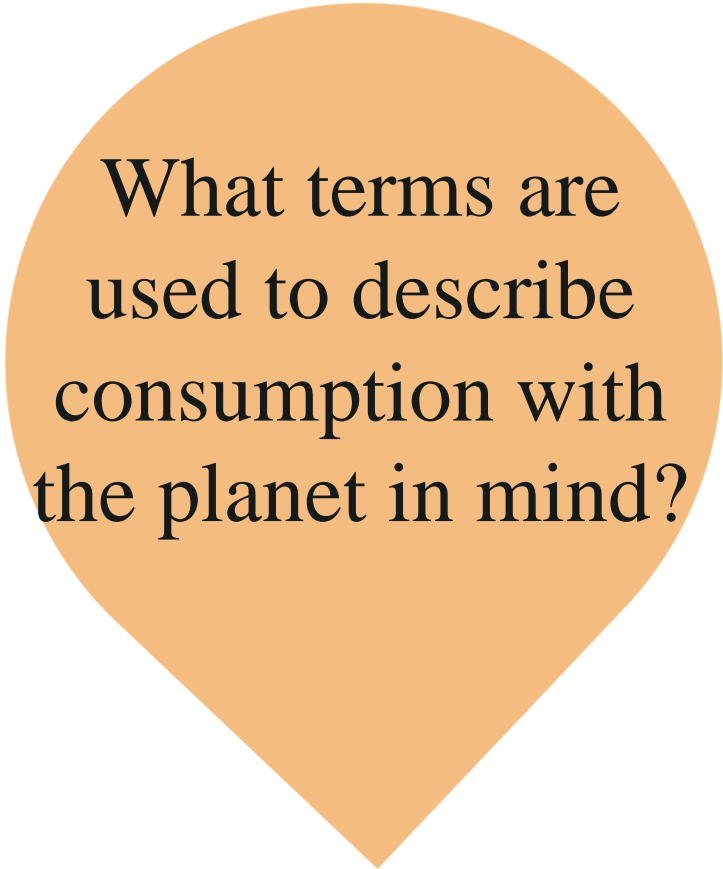
**Circular economy  
needs circular  
values, goals and  
expectations.**

**Second-hand is a  
viable solution  
but needs to be  
an alternative not  
an extra.**

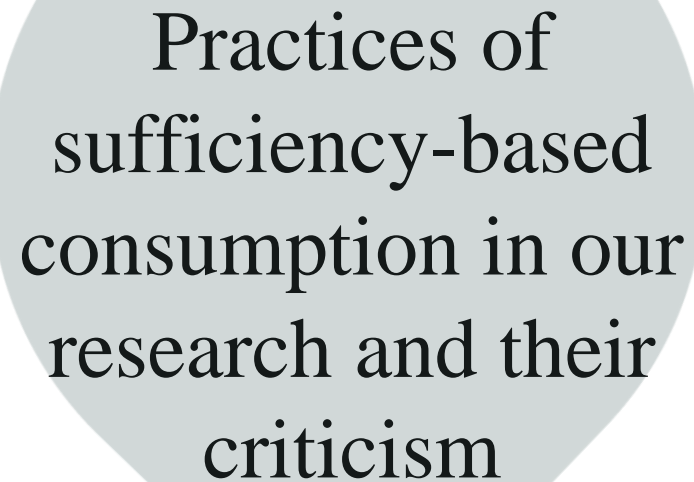
**Volume and  
frequency are at  
the core of  
unsustainability.**

**Circularity is more  
than one product. It  
requires systematic  
change.**

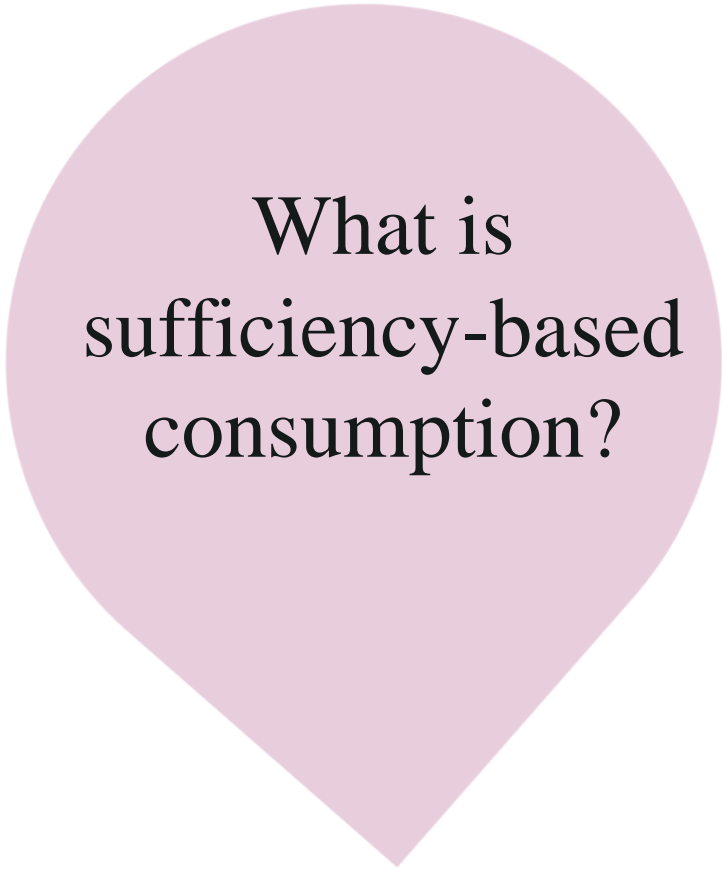
What opportunities do consumers have  
to consume textiles and at the same  
time take care of the planet?



What terms are  
used to describe  
consumption with  
the planet in mind?



Practices of  
sufficiency-based  
consumption in our  
research and their  
criticism



What is  
sufficiency-based  
consumption?



conscious  
eco-conscious  
environmental  
green circular  
consumption  
eco-friendly  
sustainable  
ethical  
responsible



# Sufficiency-driven consumption



The **sufficiency-driven approach** advocates changing consumers lifestyles by *'satisfying 'needs' rather than promoting 'wants' and fast-fashion'* (Garcia-Ortega et al. 2023; Freudenreich and Schaltegger 2020; Bocken and Short 2016; Gorge et al. 2015).

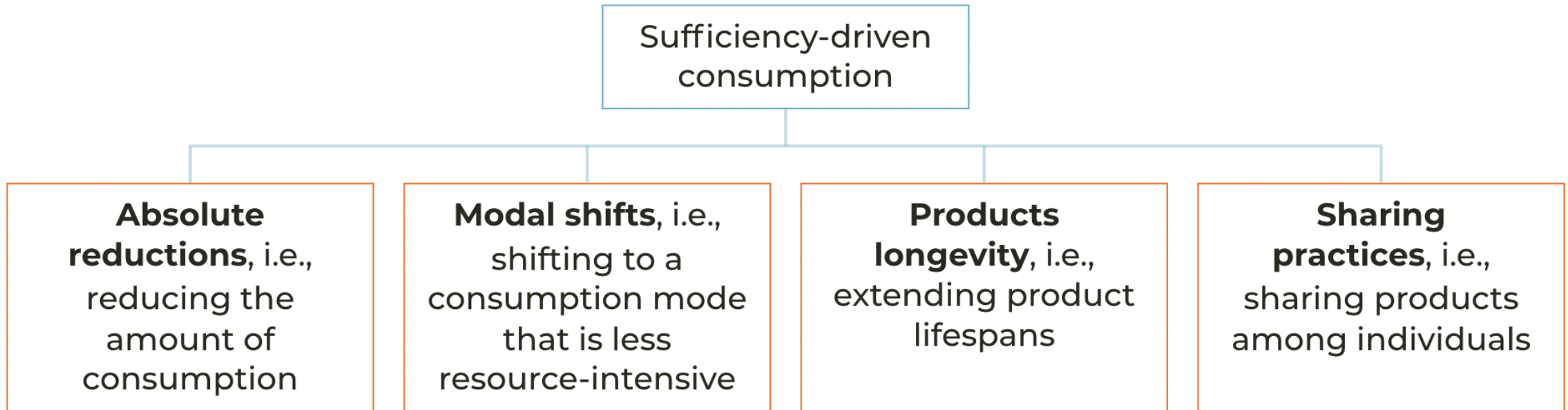
# "Consumption corridors"

- It describe a space **between minimum consumption standards** that provide every individual with the ability to live a good life, and **maximum consumption standards** that keep individuals from consuming in quantities or ways that hurt others' chances to do the same" (Fuchs et al., 2021, p.4).
- Thus, consumption corridors assume **pursuing the good life and justice within planetary boundaries**" (Persson 2022: 23).
- **BUT: What is "need" and what is "want"? What is "enough"? Who defines it?**



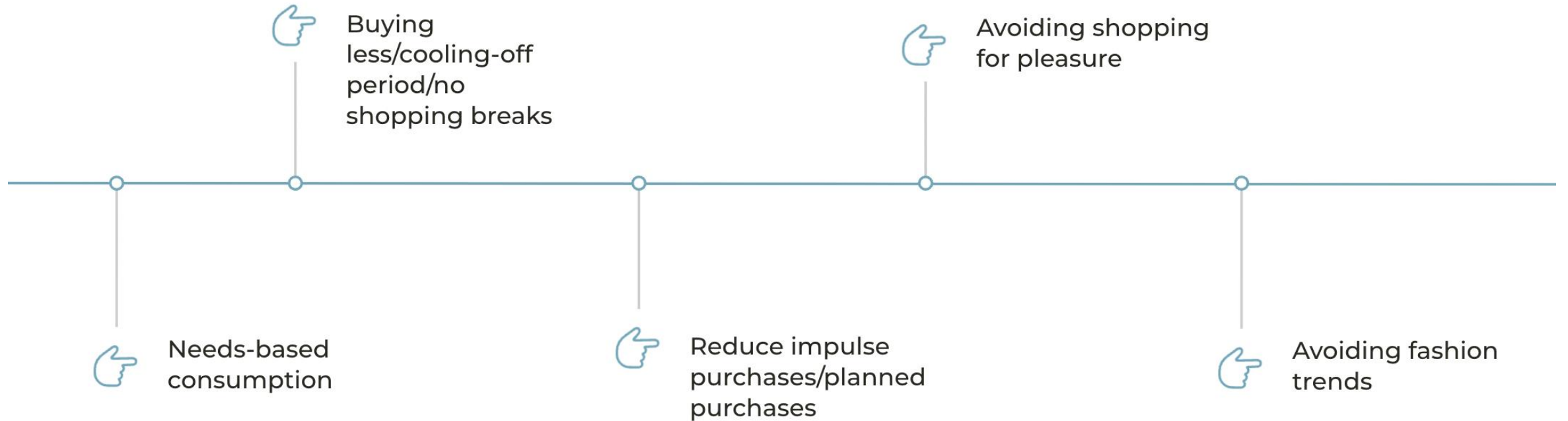
# Data sources

- 29 interviews with consumers in Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Sweden
- Adults 18+, living across countries
- Part of the interviews were conducted by the Finnish research company Crowst Oy; part – by project partners.



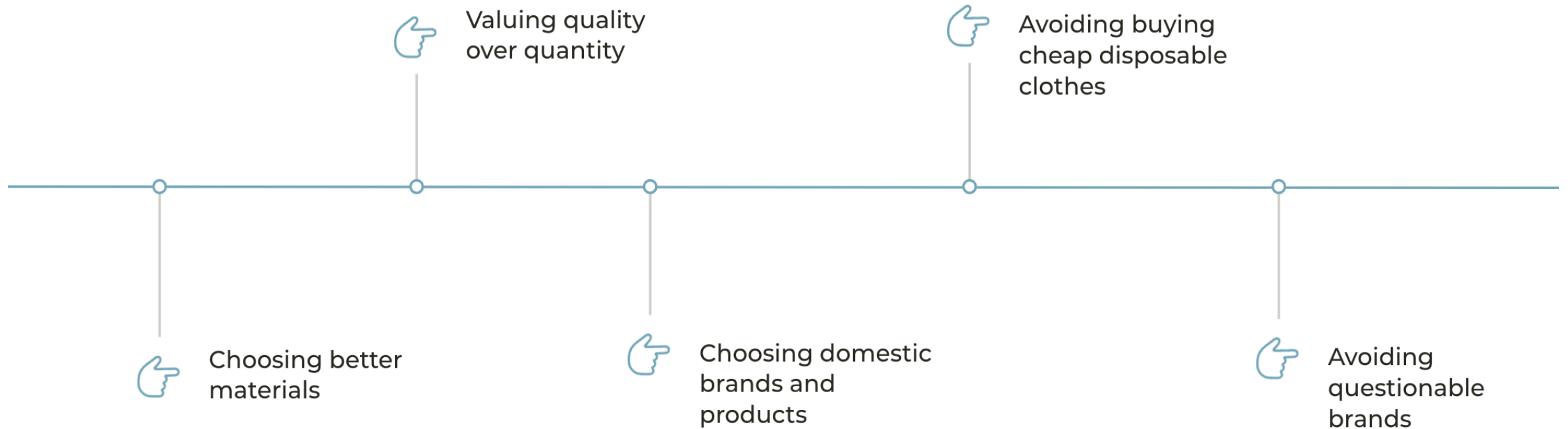
Gossen, Kropfeld 2022

# Absolute reductions

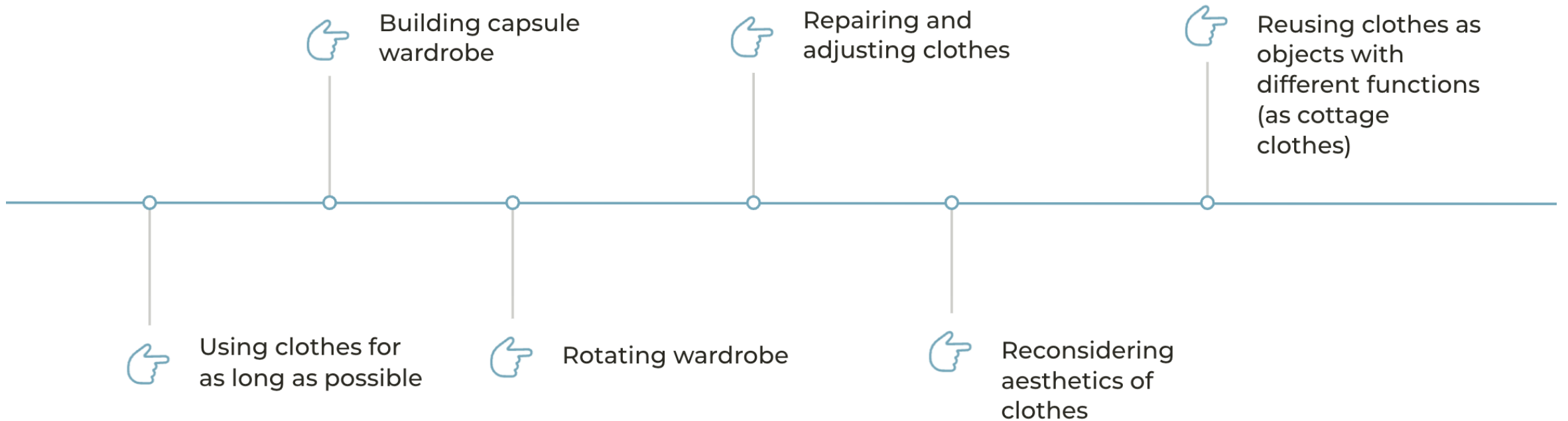




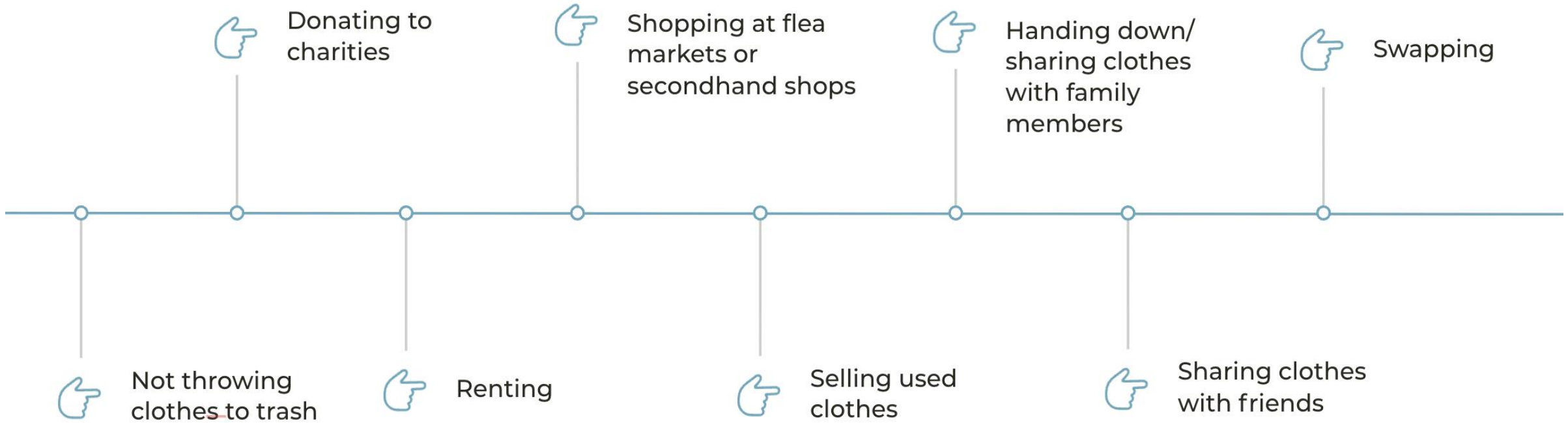
# Modal shifts



# Product longevity



# Sharing practices



# Key take-away points:

1. **Adopt a needs-based approach**
2. **Avoid impulse purchases**
3. **Wear clothes for as long as possible**
4. **Repair and maintain them**
5. **Build a capsule wardrobe and follow timeless styles**
6. **Opt for second-hand and rental options as an alternative to new things**
7. **Support sustainable brands and avoid fast-fashion companies associated with harm towards the planet and human beings**
8. **Value quality over quantity**
9. **Find creative ways to reuse and recycle clothing instead of discarding old clothes.**

# Companies are blamed for greenwashing, but what about consumers?



They are not always consistent in their behavioral patterns



They claim one thing and do another



By choosing one area, they use it as a token for their behavior



They don't reduce their overall consumption.





Consumers say  
they support  
sustainability,  
but don't act or  
don't act enough  
or act  
controversially

“Attitude-  
behavior  
gap”/“value-  
action gap”

“Rebound  
effect”

.... sometimes I still buy fast fashion things, but its more deliberate. It's more things that I really need. And nowadays I write lists of things that I need (Sweden, F, 22)

I buy at least once a month... when I notice that I've spent quite a lot of money on clothes, I might be like: Now I don't buy even during this month, or I don't buy for six months or so, but I usually do when it's... those flea market visits, when it is an entertainment with friends, so always something is bought (Finland, F, 29).



“I like to favor domestic brands because I know that they are genuinely made here in the country, employ people here in the country. Our quality standards are quite different from, for example, shoes or clothes from China”...

[Do you buy Chinese brands?] “Let's just say that they are also used... The reason I ordered this from China is that I can't find any dresses or clothes that are the like: different, colorful, or made of the particular material. So, then you just have to, unfortunately you have to resort to China... Well at the moment, if you order anything from China, if it's clothes, it's through Shein” (Finland, F, 24).



“I often feel like if I found something second-hand that I kind of like, I automatically... feel like I have to get it because it's the only chance and if it doesn't fit 100%, like you want it, you can maybe buy it anyways and then you never wear it because it doesn't fit you... that's been a problem for me... But then... you can sell it again, no, give it to charity. So, I think it's... just an extra cycle”  
(Sweden, F, 23).

Then I feel that there are a lot of attempts to sell at ridiculous prices, some old clothes, so no it does not it sometimes feel that there is no sense in those prices (Finland, M, 31).

# What shall consumers do to become more sustainable, and still consume?

**Don't just  
say, act**

**Don't use  
sustainability  
as a token**

**Acknowledge  
limitations of  
your  
consumption  
patterns**

**Reduce  
consumption**



# Baltic2Hand

As good as new: Enhancing the behavioral and business change of the second-hand textile industry in the Central Baltic region.

[Read More](#)



## Contact us

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