

# *shared* fate

This thesis investigates the potential of hyper-local level clothing exchange networks as alternatives to conventional consumption models. Through the development and implementation of a framework for clothing sharing in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, this project examines how hyperlocal infrastructure—including laundromats, dry cleaners, clothing donation bins, mutual aid groups, block associations—can be leveraged to create micro-level exchange systems and build community connection.

RE-IMAGINING HOW WE CONSUME

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To share is to recognize that

# OUR FATES ARE BOUND TOGETHER

It is the first technology of survival and will be our most advanced technology of thriving.

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TREBOR SCHOLZ

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The contemporary clothing industry operates on a model of overproduction that has created unprecedented environmental and social challenges. The average American consumer discards 81.5 pounds of clothing annually. That's almost 2,150 garments every second (Earth.org). This staggering rate of disposal represents not only an environmental crisis but also a significant economic loss. Bloomberg estimates that under-wearing and failing to recycle clothing contributes to approximately \$500 billion in annual economic losses globally. Further compounding this issue, garments are now worn 36% less frequently than they were just 15 years ago, reflecting a fundamental shift in consumer behavior toward disposability rather than durability.

The rise of digital channels has accelerated these trends, with online shopping, social media influencers, and rapid trend cycles fueling overconsumption patterns, particularly among Millennials and Gen-Z demographics. Brands have capitalized on this demand through hyper-fast supply chains, exploitative labor practices, and unsustainable resource use, resulting in clothing that is rarely worn before being discarded and ending up in a landfill. The COVID-19 pandemic further polarized the apparel market, strengthening the positions of both fast fashion retailers and luxury brands while squeezing mid market offerings that often provide more accessible and sustainable options (McKinsey, 2023).

Within this increasingly troubling landscape, the second-hand fashion market offers a promising alternative...



**small  
is  
beautiful**  
a study of economics  
as if people mattered  
**EF Schumacher**

Designer Positionality—

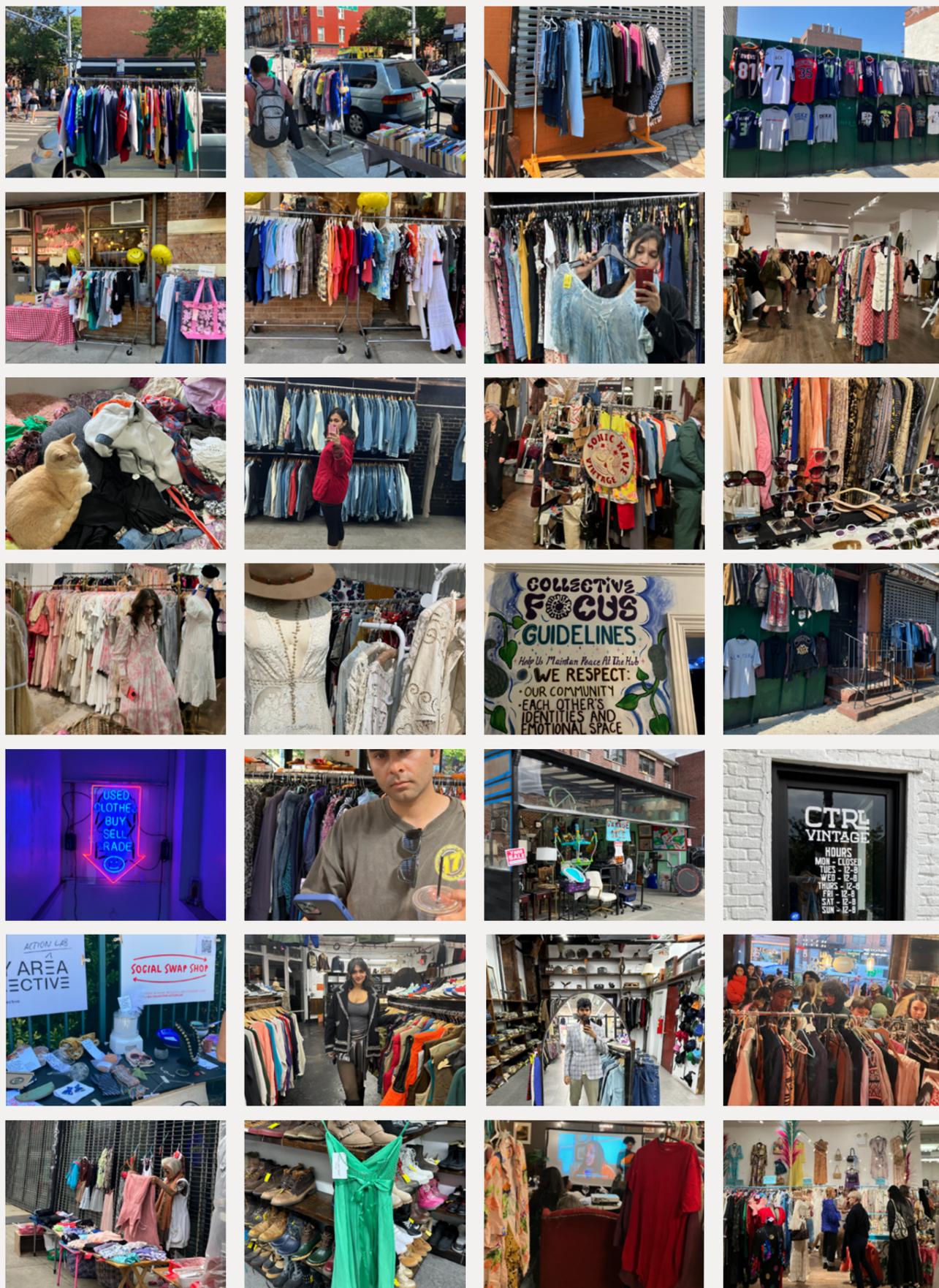
As someone who has worked at the intersections of design, commerce, and social equity, I'm becoming increasingly interested in the nature of the consumer behaviors and the logics that shape how we consume.

Which facets of consumer behavior are moveable, and which are so unshakeable that it's nearly impossible to imagine them ever changing?

Through the documentation of experiences and stories, this research explores a journey of sharing and lending as intentional, collective practices.

I position this work at the crossroads of community and systems, seeking to devise decentralized frameworks and tools that are so accessible, flexible and adaptable, that they could be replicated and iterated on by communities anywhere. This thesis represents not only academic research but an active engagement in my own community, where I serve simultaneously as designer, participant, and friend.





The second-hand market is projected to double in size over the next five years, the second-hand market represents a growing desire—particularly amongst younger adults—for accessible, affordable options to clothing purchases (Statista, 2024). The global value of second-hand apparel is forecast to reach \$84 billion by 2030, marking a \$56 billion increase in just one decade, suggesting that fast fashion could soon be outpaced by the second-hand market. A shift that may be expedited by recently implemented tariffs, considering that 98% of clothing sold in the United States is imported. Tariffs on imported clothing are expected to impact many segments of the fashion industry, and could increase apparel prices by as much as 58% in the short term and 26% in the long term, according to Yale Budget Lab researchers (2025).

This affirms that there is no need to produce more clothing when there is already more than enough, especially when there is growing demand for what has already been produced. However, the growth of the second-hand market alone will not address the systemic issues embedded in our clothing production and consumption frameworks without intentional and thoughtful reconsideration.

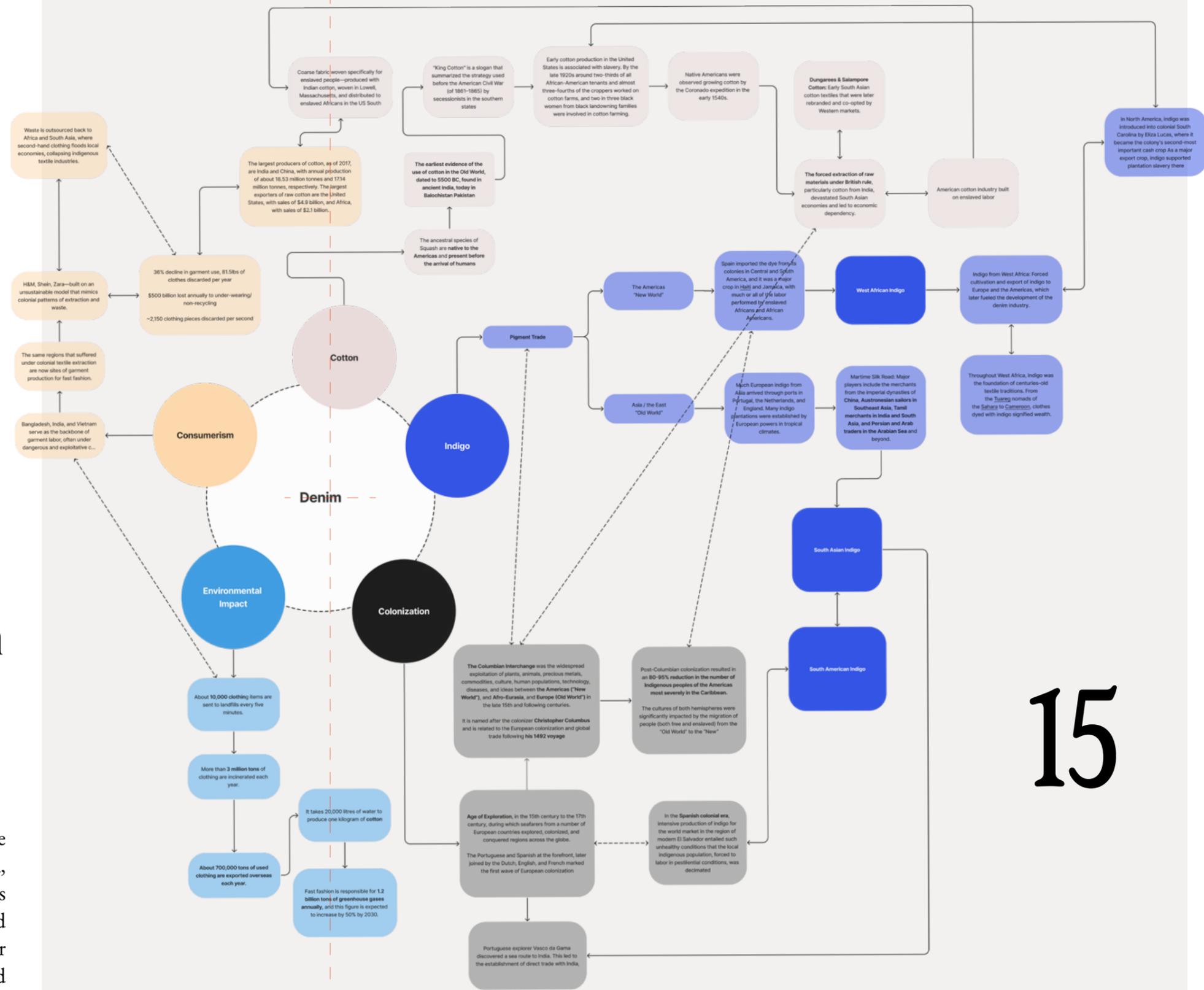
Through my research, I held conversations with a 22 second-hand item vendors in North Brooklyn (Williamsburg, Bushwick, Bed-Stuy) to understand their successes, business models, consumer engagement strategies, and barriers or challenges to understand where gaps or opportunities in the landscape might exist.



The contemporary global supply chain for clothing is not a new development but rather the continuation of centuries-old patterns of extraction and exploitation. From the transatlantic enslavement of African peoples to European imperialism, the production and trade of textiles have long been rooted in labor exploitation and the forced extraction of resources from the Global South.

Denim: Cotton & Indigo Systems Map

Cotton and indigo—commodities essential to fashion—were historically cultivated through colonization across South Asia, West Africa, and the Americas. These same extractive processes still underpin today's global fashion industry, where labor and the extraction of raw materials remain concentrated in former colonies like Bangladesh, India, and Vietnam, while textile and clothing waste is sent to Sub Saharan Africa, particularly Kenya and Ghana (Greenpeace, 2023).



Understanding historical context is crucial to reimagining the future and reducing further harm.

This historical perspective reveals an important distinction between supply chains and supply networks. Supply chains, designed primarily for resource extraction and profit maximization, stand in stark contrast to supply networks, which foster circular, localized economies (Black Fibres and Textile Network, 2024).

During my participation in the clothing swap event through Bedstuy Clothes Swa, Black Textiles & Fibres Network spoke

about the importance of preserving Black cultural agency in the agricultural, fiber, textile and fashion industries and systems. They are working to build directories and networks of Black producers at every step of the supply process.

This distinction is central to understanding how alternative models might avoid replicating the exploitative patterns of conventional fashion systems.

Production, consumption, and waste all still remain deeply entangled with violent colonial legacies.

## Colonialism never ended; it rebranded itself as consumerism. 16

I conducted a data-driven exploration of global clothing trade flows using the UN Comtrade 2023 database. I created data visualizations of both new apparel and worn clothing trades to reveal imbalances between the Global North's consumption and the Global South's role as an extraction and disposal ground.

This analysis helped me contextualize my thesis on collaborative consumption by underscoring the urgency for local, equitable, and circular fashion systems that resist these extractive global patterns.

Key insights showed countries that import massive volumes of **new** clothing—like the U.S., Germany, and the UK—are also among the top exporters of **worn garments**.

These used clothes are shipped to countries such as Ghana, Pakistan, Kenya, and Ukraine, where they are sorted, resold, or often dumped, resulting in environmental and economic harm to local communities—revealing how secondhand markets often serve as pipelines for waste rather than circular reuse.

Our current trade flows mirror historical trade relationships and reinforces the continued extraction of labor and resources from the Global South to support consumption in the Global North.

In Ghana, the capital city of Accra has become a dumping ground for the Global North's unwanted clothing is accumulating in landfills and waterways. This overflow has created serious environmental and public health hazards, turning entire neighborhoods into textile-filled toxic zones (ABC News, 2021).

Similarly, in Chile's Atacama Desert, an estimated 66,000 tons of discarded clothing, much of it barely worn or brand new, has formed an unregulated textile graveyard so large it is now visible from space (Waste360, 2021; CBS News, 2022; National Geographic, 2023).

These cases clearly show how even the second-hand trade, when divorced from true circularity, can perpetuate ecological harm and reinforce global systems of colonialism.

Used clothing landfill in the Atacama Desert, Chile



Used clothing landfill in Accra, Ghana



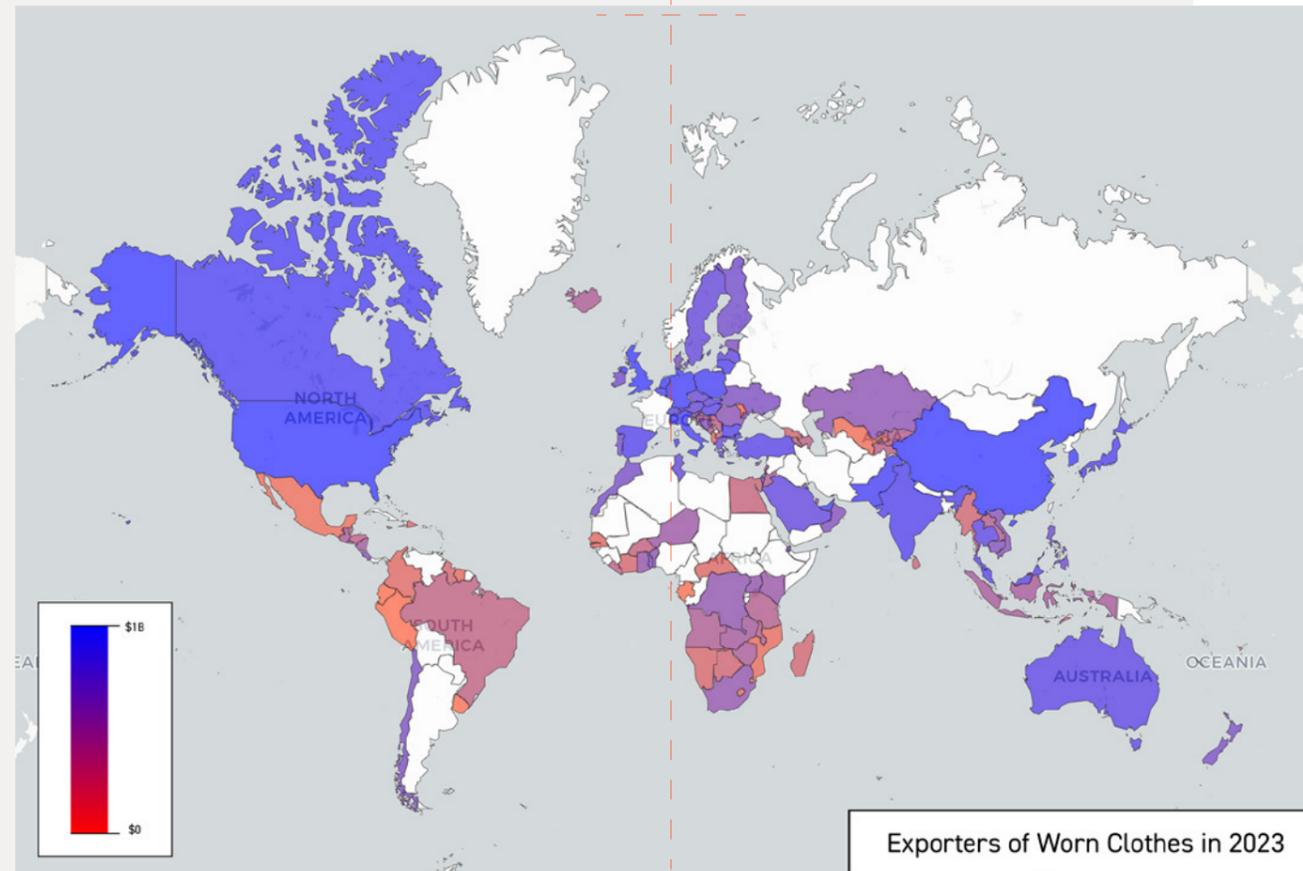
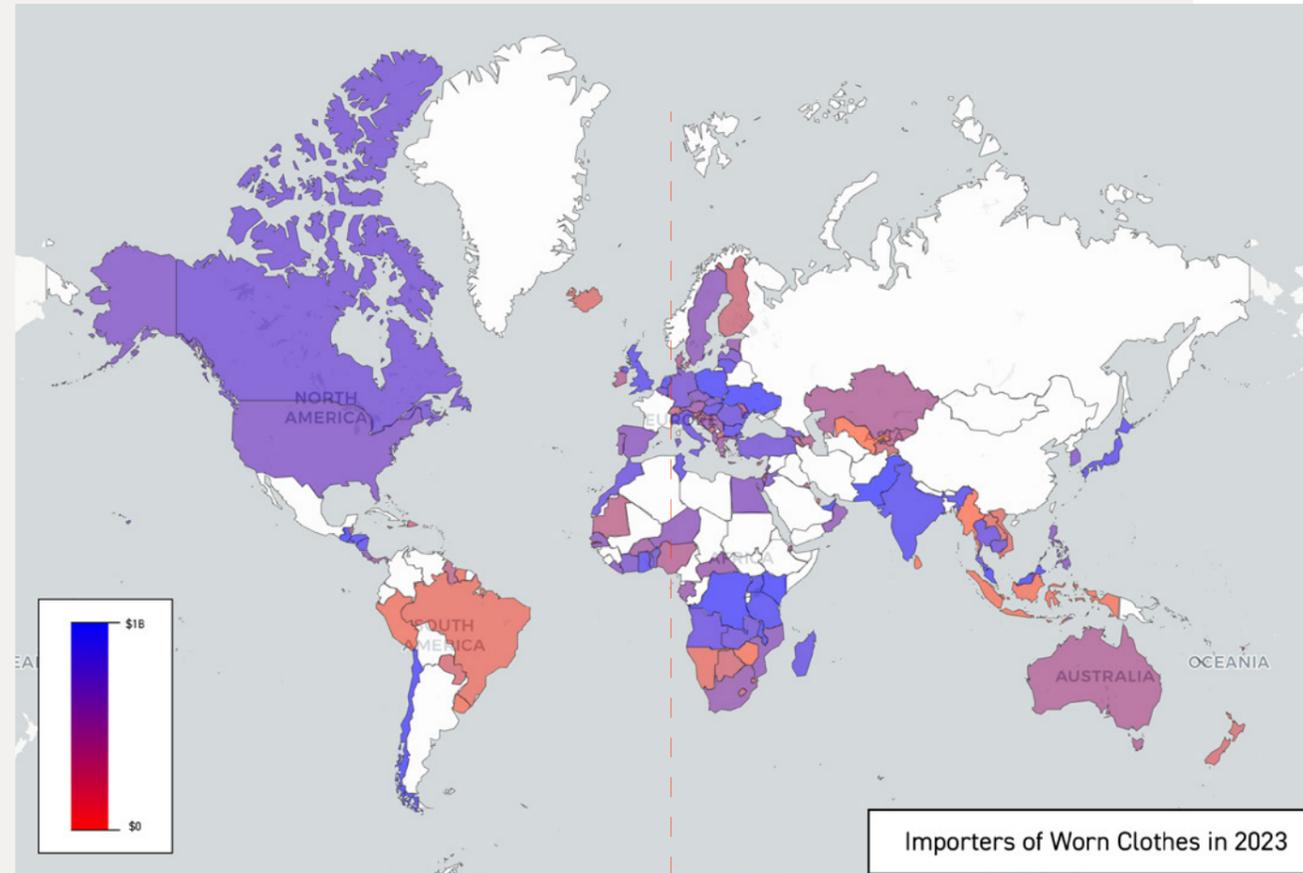
The aim of conducting this data study of global trade flows was to evaluate, and hopefully to validate, the core premise of my research. It was important to me to present that your thesis isn't solely grounded in theory or qualitative insight, but also in data-backed systemic analysis.

I hoped to support and add credibility to my my historical research by visualizing how modern trade mimics colonial patterns of Transatlantic trade routes, sustaining cycles of economic dependency and labor exploitation.

By contrasting the global landscape of clothing displacement with the local level work that takes place in this project, this data-driven framing provides measurable evidence for why a shift toward localized clothing sharing systems is not just idealistic but urgently necessary.

If new frameworks of fashion consumption—like shared neighborhood closets—are to be truly sustainable and just, they must resist the prevailing patterns of extraction, exploitation, and displacement that have defined the industry for centuries.

Conducting My Own Data Analysis & Visualization as Research Validation and Fact Checking



As we consider the potential of second-hand clothing to mitigate the environmental impact of the fashion industry, it is instructive to examine the shortcomings of other sustainability initiatives.

The U.S. recycling system provides a cautionary tale: despite wide access and decades of public education campaigns, only 26–32% of Americans recycle correctly (Recycling Partnership, 2024; Columbia Climate School, 2023). This reveals how convoluted and flawed infrastructures can undermine even the most well-intentioned sustainable practices.

We need to prevent second-hand consumption from falling into the same traps that have limited the effectiveness of recycling programs in the United States. Recycling programs often fail due to inefficiencies, contamination issues, and an over-reliance on individual consumer responsibility without adequate supporting infrastructure.

The privatization of recycling has further complicated these systems, often prioritizing profit over environmental benefit.

As second-hand clothing rises in popularity, we must ask: how prepared are we to support this shift in a way that avoids the pitfalls of broken systems like recycling and prevents the perpetuation of colonial and exploitative practices?

We often think envisioning alternatives to our current modes of exchange as too big of a task, too idealistic, too theoretical.

In NYC, today, there are hundreds of folks practicing alternative methods of selling / trading / repairing / exchanging and they're thriving.

There are tangible localized, community-driven alternatives all around us, started by people like you and me with incredible stories to share

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Research Methodology — Participation is research!

I will be referring to my work as engagement, involvement, participation, organizing or any other additive terms that mean joining in and collaborating on what exists ;)



Rare Vintage Findz, a sidewalk secondhand clothing vendor in Williamsburg, Brooklyn

This thesis employed a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews, participant observation, and prototype testing to explore the potential of hyperlocal clothing exchange networks.

Primary research for this project included interviews and conversations with secondhand clothing vendors and sellers to provide insights into any challenges, barriers, and opportunities in the second-hand market. I wanted to explore the alternatives to what we have, without creating something completely new— and prioritizing community over profits.

What if we worked with existing resources rather than creating new products, and met people where they already are? Can we build models of exchange that operate outside the systems of transactionality and consumerism?

To better understand these questions, I spoke with Cues, a Bed-Stuy based community-driven circular shop that collects and resells used items collected from local residents. They center affordability and hyper-locality and avoiding large-scale operations or commercialization. I spent time with Steven & Quentin, the co-founders, to understand their operational structure, benefits and challenges of hyperlocality, and brick + mortar store versus digital platforms.

I partnered with Bedstuy Clothes Swap as a volunteer facilitator of 2 community clothing swap events hosted in North Brooklyn, where I was able to gather first-hand observations on what clothing types were the most claimed and which were the most left behind.

Insights showed that occasion-based clothing item and statement pieces were the most swapped clothing types, while sweatshirts and hoodies were the least. I also participated in organizing and set-up logistics, allowing me to establish some practices for clothing sorting, categorization, and measurement.

Black Fibers and Textile Network collaborated with us on one of the clothing swap events and provided valuable perspective on ethical textile practices and alternatives to conventional supply chains.

Field research and notes were collected from local laundry services, dry cleaners, alteration services, used clothing collection bins, mutual aid groups, to understand existing infrastructure that could support community-based clothing exchange networks.

Conversation and hang-outs with six neighbors from my block in Bed-Stuy offered insights into community needs and existing resource-sharing groups.

## Depth over scale— instead of scaling up, can we grow deeper into community?

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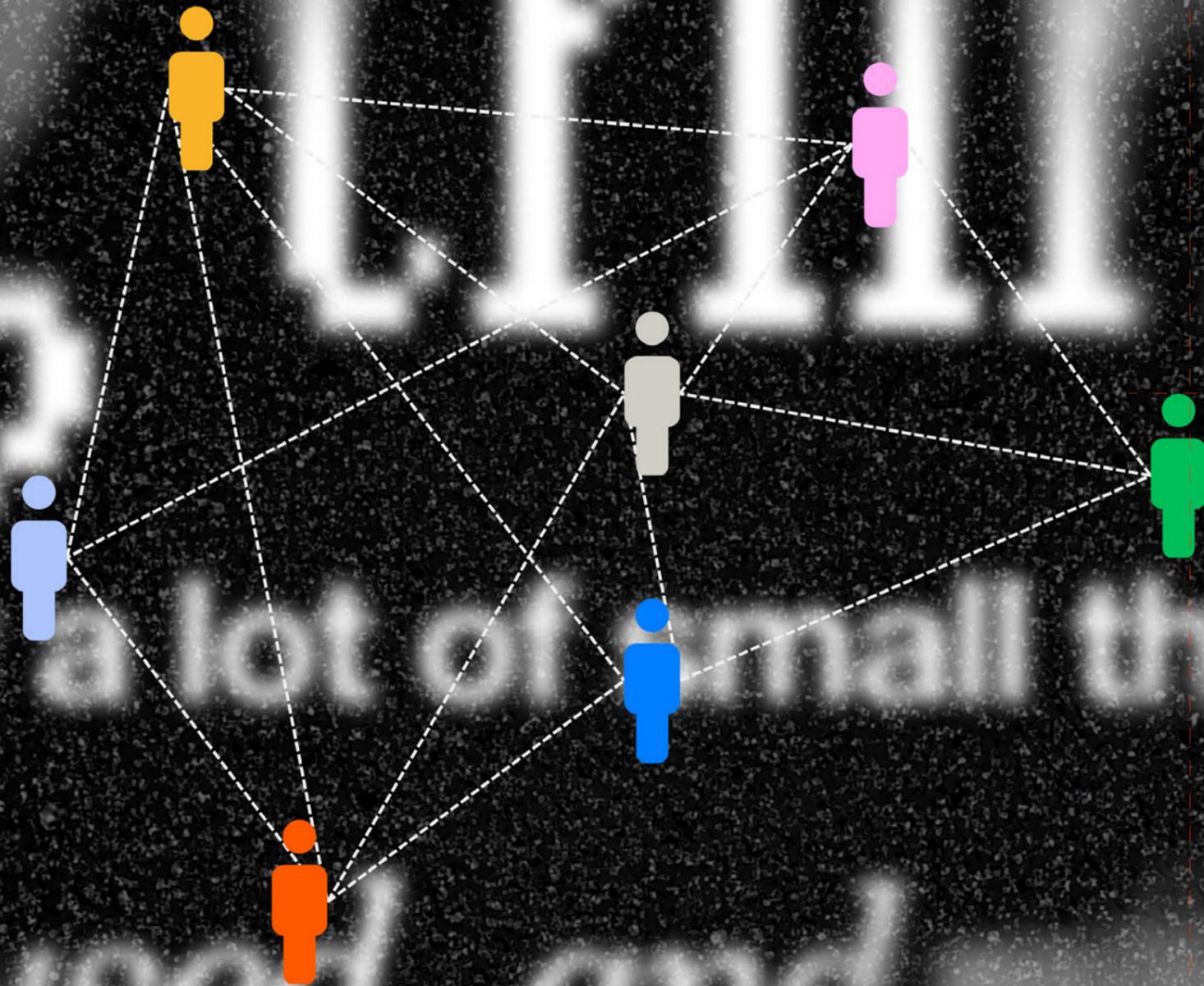
The next

big thing

is actually a lot of small things—

*shared, reused, and reimaged*

— *Ezio Manzini*



Engagement with secondhand clothing varies a lot by age and culture

Younger adults, particularly GenZ and Millennials, are the most active shoppers of secondhand clothing, especially in the range of 23 - 36 years old. Studies indicate that a significant portion of this group, ~45 - 65%, already engage with secondhand shopping.

Generation X (45 - 59): May not thrift as much, but engage with secondhand market in many ways from estate sales, vintage and heirlooms, auctions, yard/stoop sales, eBay, Craigslist, refurbished luxury and more.

Baby Boomers (60 - 79): Are less likely to shop secondhand, but often the most active in sharing resources between friends, family, and community and have a long standing history and culture of doing so

The primary participant group for this research consists of women aged 22 - 38 living in North Brooklyn. This demographic was selected based on the fact that there is both statistical and ethnographic evidence showing higher engagement with second-hand fashion.

There was geographical accessibility for involvement of participants throughout prototyping and research .

There is a high concentration of second-hand shops in the area, reflecting a broader, deeply rooted culture of thrifting throughout New York City. Many residents already engage in second-hand consumption, whether exclusively or in part. In fact, Brooklyn is often regarded as one of the thrifting capitals of the world.

While this specific demographic serves as the initial test group, the frameworks developed are intended to be adaptable to diverse communities with varied demographic compositions.



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In the early stages of developing the clothing-sharing framework, I focused on brainstorming practical systems that could balance trust, inclusivity, and ease of use.

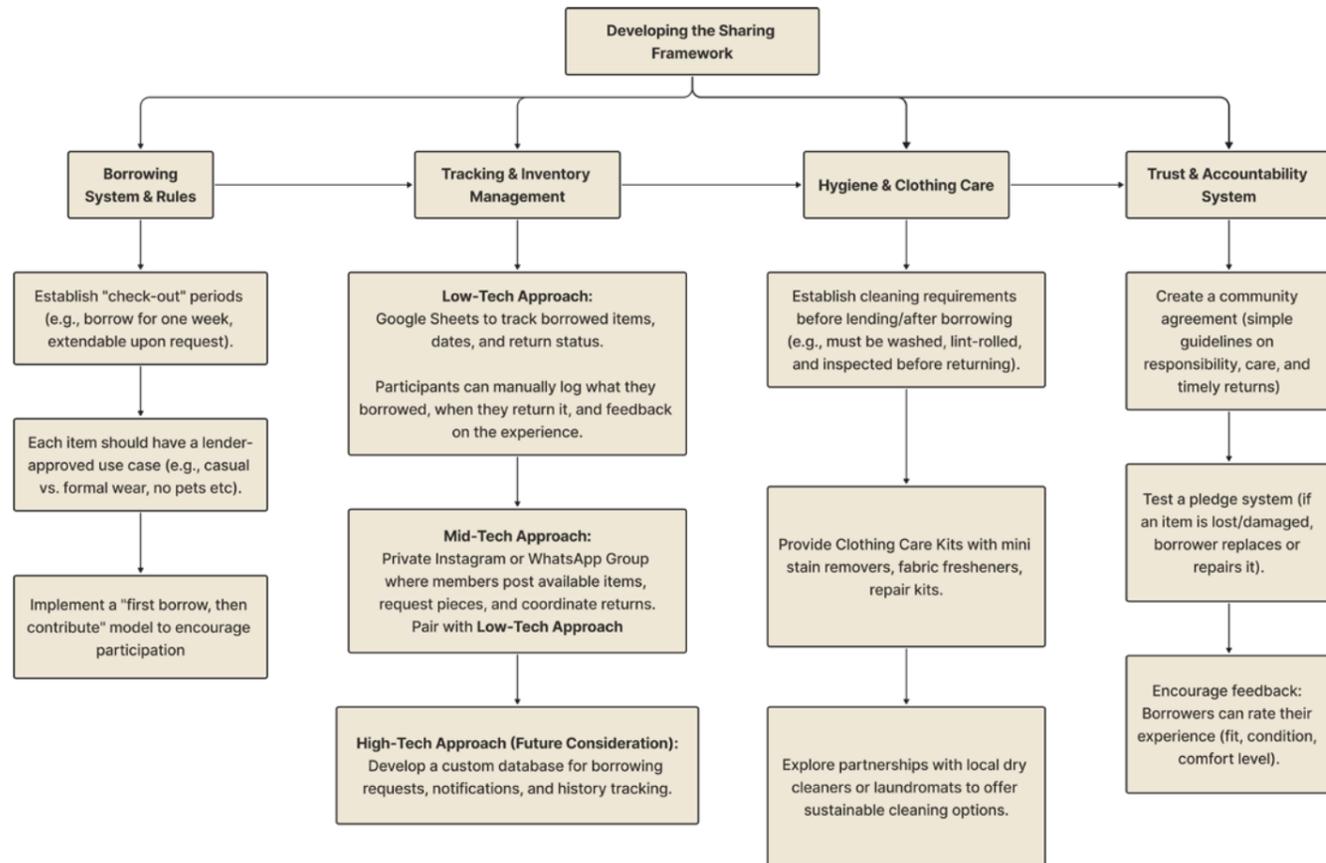
I explored a four-part structure: a borrowing system with clear “check-out” rules and lender-approved conditions; low- to mid-tech existing tools like Google Sheets, WhatsApp, and Instagram to manage inventory and feedback; hygiene protocols to ensure cleanliness and care through pre- and post-lending requirements; and a trust-building mechanism using shared agreements and borrower reviews.

These ideas emerged from envisioning both lo-fi and more high fidelity options—essentially a small, trusted network of participants contributing high-quality pieces for everyday wear, occasion outfits, outerwear, and accessories.

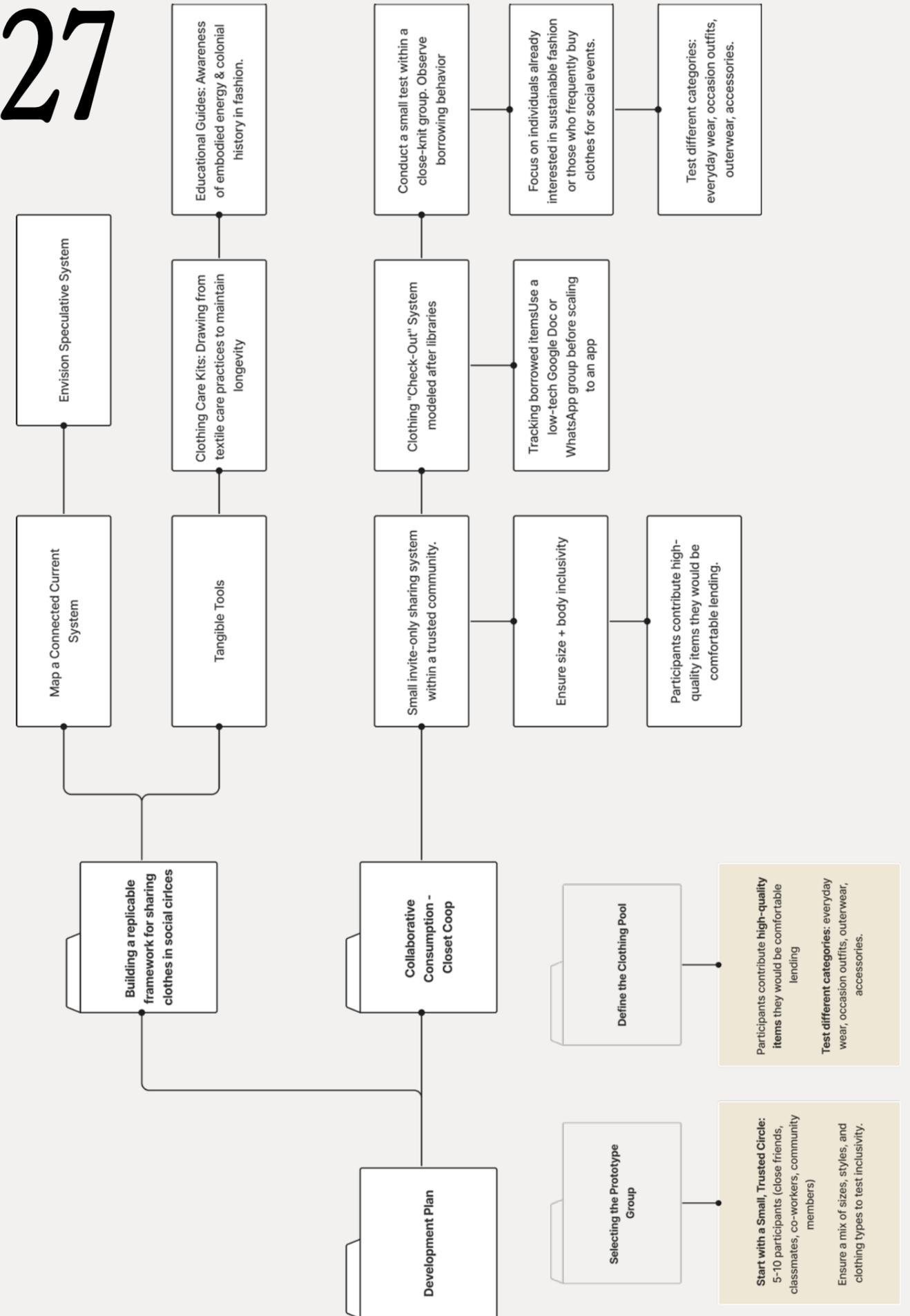
Each component was designed to minimize friction while fostering a culture of stewardship, and early ideation helped identify what would be needed to move from casual borrowing to a more structured, repeatable system.

## Journey Mapping and Prototyping

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Building an accessible circular system. Meeting people where they already are. No new things.

### 1— Make & Post Flyers with a Google Form

Make your own flyers or use the [free Canva templates](#) I made with a [Google Form template](#) included. Customize as needed and post flyers around your block / building

### 2— Create a group chat on Whatsapp

Create a Whatsapp group or community with enlisted members. If there's a lot of participants, create multiple chats based on clothing size or category!

### 3— Post on group chat

Establish community guidelines + rules. Send messages with specific clothing needs or requests. Lenders should create events with start and return dates and invite borrower to join, in order to "check out" clothing items

### 4— Documentation

Once borrower has accepted the invite, lender should send a Google Doc ([use template provided](#)) Of all details / requirements / cleaning preferences

### 5— Monthly Meetup

Finding time to return clothing items can be hard! Schedule Monthly Meetups ([Free Partiful template](#)) hosted at rotating participants homes to gather and return clothing items and get to know each other better!!!

### 6— Connect with Local Infrastructure

Develop a relationship as a group with your local dry cleaner & alteration shop, as care and repairing clothing can greatly increase its lifecycle and help to flourish your local community

### 7— Thriving micro-network through sharing + connecting

While the system remains small, its potential for replication is significant. Like community fridges or Buy Nothing groups, it could be adapted to different blocks and contexts, creating micro-infrastructures across communities.

Neighbor's

# CLOSET CLUB

The primary experiment developed through this research is a shared closet system between neighbors that leverages existing infrastructure and builds community connection and friendship.

The system design was intentionally low-tech and relationship-driven. Women in Bed-stuy, Brooklyn were invited to join a group where they could offer, request, and borrow clothing. The group could coordinate shared items by occasion or type (e.g., winter wear, or wedding guest attire, party outfits) and organize in-person gatherings.

Through this prototype, I have been exploring how to integrate existing community resources—specifically the laundromat four minutes from my residence (which offers delivery services), the nearby Helpsy clothing donation and recycling bins at the Kosciuszko J MTA stop, the local dry cleaner that provides repair and alteration services, as well as the nearby mutual aid organization. My aim is to develop a comprehensive user journey that leverages these existing entities to support a small-scale sharing ecosystem within Bedford-Stuyvesant.

# CLOSET CLUB

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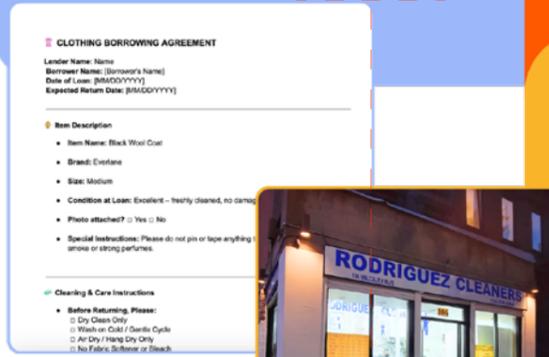
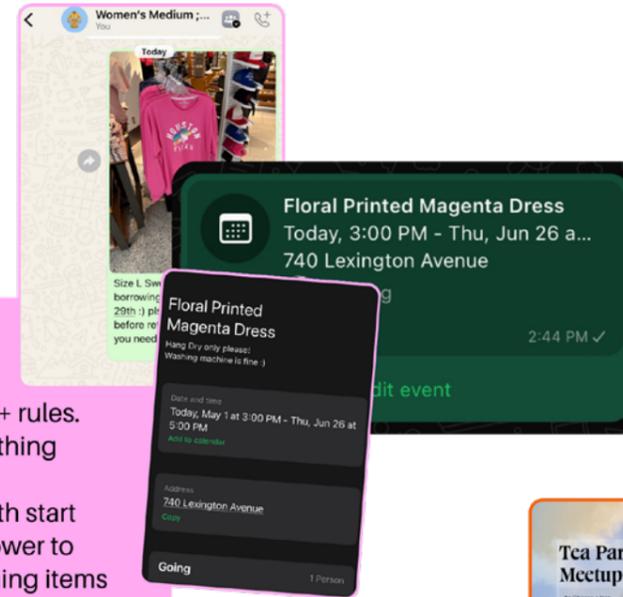
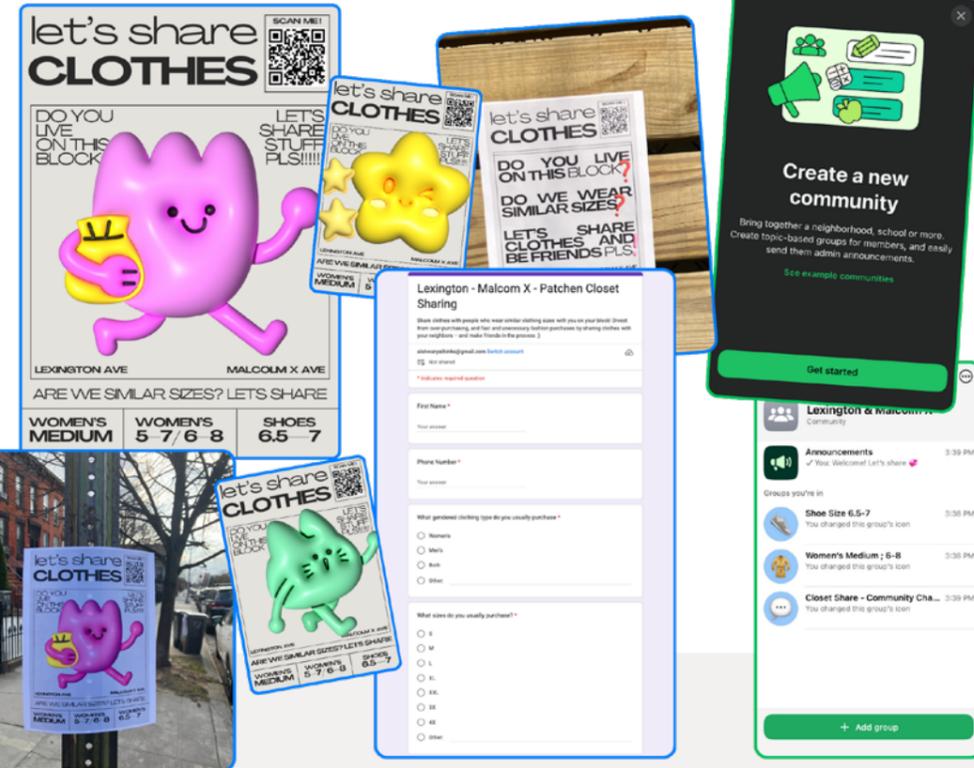
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Insights and results

The prototype clothing exchange model was tested with a small, block-based network of seven women, all part of a group chat. This size proved to be ideal, as groups larger than nine became difficult to coordinate effectively. Each participant brought between one and eight clothing items, with one item as the minimum requirement to participate.

Every attendee exchanged at least one item, and five out of the seven acquired more than two. Remarkably, 100% of the clothing present was given a second life, and each person left with a "new" item to wear.

Beyond the practical success of the exchange, participants expressed genuine joy over the concept of free, non-transactional sharing. Many shared personal stories, frustrations, and reflections about the dominant retail system, with a clear interest in moving away from it.

While several participants were already shopping second-hand, many were uncertain about its actual environmental

impact—yet all were excited about the communal, accessible, and low-stakes nature of this model. The event confirmed that small, trust-based groups of similarly sized individuals foster not only effective exchanges but also meaningful dialogue and emotional resonance around alternative forms of consumption.

A hyperlocal clothing sharing network amongst neighbors that leverages existing infrastructure while re-building community connections and honouring our collective history of lending and sharing. Instead of selling and purchasing second-hand clothing, how can we exchange with care rather than transactionality?

Prioritizing hyperlocality by building trust within communities rather than expanding for the sake of growth, and centering access over profits by creating systems of exchange rooted in care, not transaction. Grounded in historical awareness, this concept seeks to reimagine futures that prevent harm and invite collective responsibility.

Coordinating a date and time to return borrowed clothing was difficult with differing schedules and availability. We thought about scheduling monthly meetups as a way to stay connected and return any outstanding items.

I worked to develop a replicable guide for clothing exchange on a block level, that can be template-ized and customized for communities elsewhere. This research is designed for decentralized adoption and adaptation. Plans for sustaining this initiative beyond the thesis include:

Creating comprehensive guides and templates that others can freely use to establish similar networks in their own communities such as: Community Flyers, Participation Form, Community Guidelines, Lender - Borrower Agreements, Group chat Set-up Guide

Exploring formal partnerships with laundromats, dry cleaners, and local non-profits to strengthen the supporting infrastructure for clothing exchange

Developing lightweight and accessible digital tools that complement rather than replace in-person exchanges. I prioritized meeting people where they already are by using the platforms that people are already active users of.

Participants engaged enthusiastically in borrowing and swapping clothing without financial exchange, expressing pride in divesting from fast fashion and overconsumption.

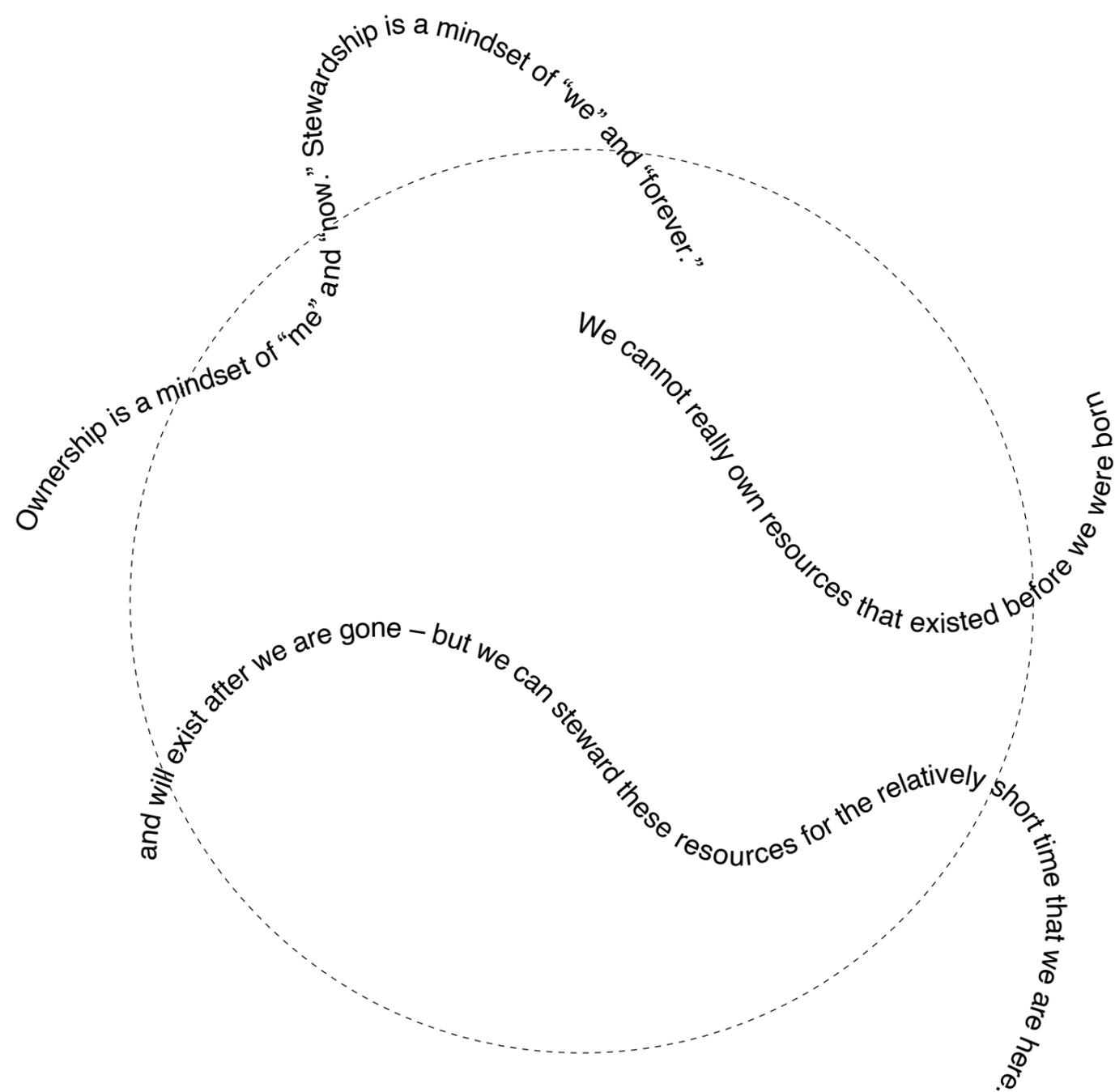
Challenges included coordinating schedules, uneven access to laundry services, and navigating trust and cleanliness preferences. Clothing size compatibility and style preferences also proved crucial to participation.

The success of the prototype relied on proximity, shared values, and mutual trust. Participants cited enjoyment in discovering new clothes and connecting with neighbors over shared resources.

The experiments confirmed and validated that simplicity, flexibility, and relational design, centered around stewardship rather than ownership, are essential to scalable, sustainable alternatives.

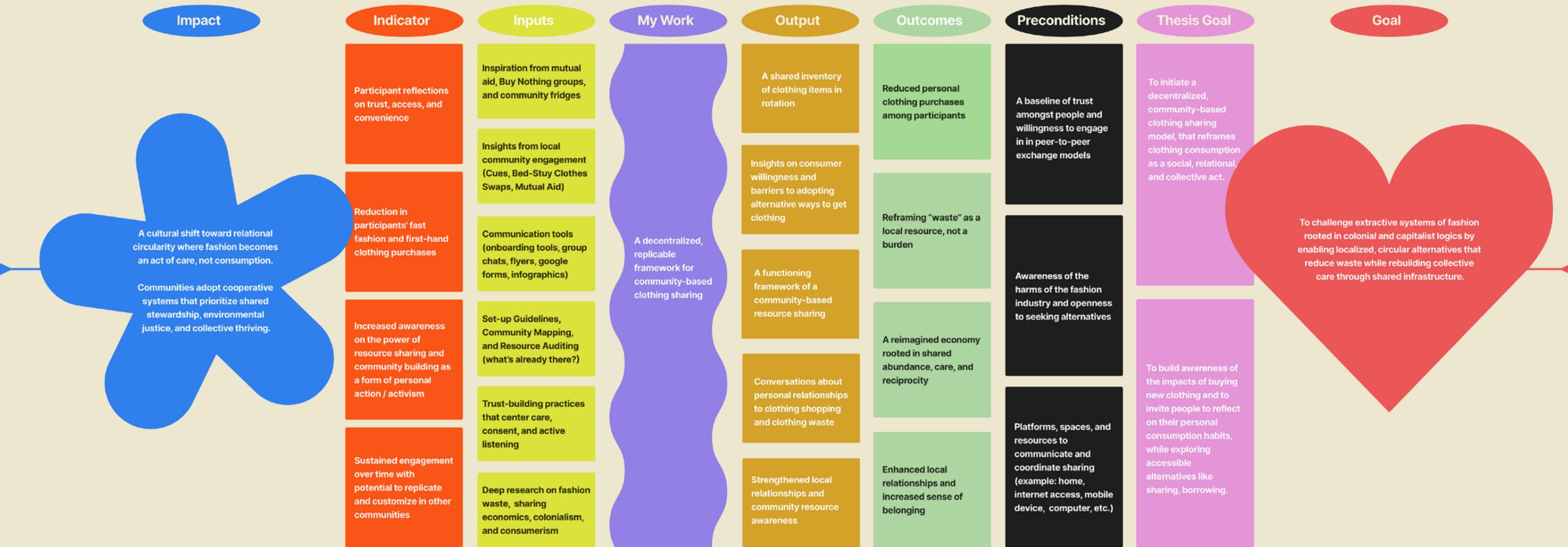
Like local Community Fridges or Buy Nothing groups, the model's lo-fi decentralized structure shows promise for adaptation across neighborhoods, provided it stays hyperlocal and accessible.

Friendship has definitely been a ripple effect of these sharing interventions. On multiple occasions participants met mutual friends or friends of friends, and have continued to connect.



# Theory of Change

long-term, cultural transformation



"The future of humanity depends not on technological breakthrough but on relational breakthrough— learning to live not just alongside each other, but with and for each other."

—adrienne maree brown

"To share is to recognize that our fates are bound together. It is the first technology of survival and will be our most advanced technology of thriving."

—Trebor Scholz

"Ownership separates us; stewardship connects us. The path forward isn't about having less, but about sharing more."

—Robin Wall Kimmerer

# WE HAVE BECOME SO REMOVED FROM OUR HISTORY OF TEXTILE AND GARMENT.

Clothing has become a highly processed and manufactured item – completely abstracted and severed from the very nature it is extracted from. Clothing is the product of historical, ancestral, political, geographical interconnectedness

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