

Beyond: Service Design for end-of-life material donations

An investigation on personal
belongings as relationships' enablers

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"A more profound appreciation of things will lead to a more profound appreciation of persons."

(Miller, 2010)

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Having recently experienced the loss of a parent and dealing with the great amount of personal belongings left behind was and still is a daily challenge for me and my family. Along with those who kindly opened up sharing similar experiences, I can attest that it goes much further than just a few furniture pieces, decorative objects, and working tools.

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Abstract ITA

La diffusione della Pandemia da Covid-19 ha causato un generale senso di imprevedibilità e ha portato ad agire su quelle aree più controllabili della vita per riprendere il controllo. Spostare e rivedere oggetti materiali in casa ha rappresentato l'opportunità di ristabilire l'ordine in modo tangibile e intangibile.

Una literature review di fonti sulla material culture ha rivelato che la gestione degli oggetti materiali equivale a rivedere e riorganizzare le relazioni. Con l'obiettivo di investigare le peculiarità di un fenomeno universale, svariate pratiche che ruotano attorno alla gestione degli oggetti personali sono state esplorate con il contributo di persone italiane tra i 24 e i 76 anni. Alcuni stavano scegliendo cosa tenere e portare in preparazione di uscire da casa dei genitori, altri si stavano ridimensionando in vista degli anni più avanzati, altri erano responsabili della massa di oggetti rimasta dopo la morte di un parente. Nonostante la molteplicità e diversità delle pratiche, tutti si sono trovati ad affrontare una situazione emotivamente complessa nel prendere decisioni.

Sistemare, scegliere, riusare, regalare e scartare mobili, oggetti, vestiti, decorazioni sono tutte azioni che rivelano come la materialità degli oggetti sia capace di esternalizzare le scelte nella dimensione sociale e familiare. Decidere cosa fare di un oggetto comune ma emotivamente rilevante che non si può tenere, regalare o passare a qualcuno di caro è difficile.

Le opzioni attualmente disponibili per dare via questi oggetti sono molto limitate e limitanti, perché principalmente basate su una visione materialistica. Serve un cambio di paradigma, che possa ampliare lo spettro di soluzioni disponibili. Forme di donazione più open-ended, ad esempio, includendo persone fuori dal cerchio di famiglia e amici potrebbero rappresentare una soluzione promettente per ridirezionare oggetti comuni ma emotivamente rilevanti.

Rispondendo alle difficoltà riportate da chi sta tentando di ridimensionare i propri averi prima degli ultimi anni di vita, e chi deve decidere cosa fare degli oggetti lasciati da persone scomparse, Beyond punta a ripensare la pratica del testamento in modo informale, invitando le persone a valutare e scegliere i propri oggetti prima di scomparire, e organizzare il proprio lascito con figli e nipoti. Infine, la proposta di servizio ha lo scopo di aiutare a superare le difficoltà emotive che vengono con il gestire oggetti personali in momenti transitori della vita, e limitare i problemi incombenti di overconsumption, facendo leva sull'opportunità di regalare per favorire la nascita di nuove relazioni tra donatori e riceventi.

Abstract EN

The spread of the Covid-19 Pandemic brought an overall sense of unpredictability and led people to act on small controllable areas of life to retrieve control. Managing material belongings in the household represented an opportunity to re-establish order in the tangible and intangible dimension.

A comprehensive review of material culture literature revealed that managing material items equals to revisiting and reordering relationships. With the aim of investigating the peculiarities of a more universal phenomenon, several practices revolving around the management of objects were explored with the contribution of Italian people aged 24-76. Some were sorting through their belongings in preparation of moving out of parents' house, others were downsizing before the later years of life, and others again were responsible for handling the belongings left by recently passed relatives. Despite the multiplicity and diversity of practices, all informants experienced a high degree of emotional complexity in making decisions. Rearranging, sorting out, repurposing, gifting, and discarding furniture pieces, clothes, décor, were all actions in which the materiality of objects externalized choices made in the social and kinship dimension of their owner. The most challenging decisions were made on those ordinary but emotionally relevant belongings that they could not afford to keep, gift or pass down.

Current options for giving away unwanted belongings are very limited and limiting, primarily based on a materialistic model. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed, along with an effort to amplify the spectrum of available solutions. More open-ended forms of giving, such as including people in need outside of one's family and friends' circle could provide a potential solution for redirecting ordinary but emotionally relevant belongings.

Addressing the challenges of those attempting to death-clean their spaces and those responsible for tackling dead relative's belongings, Beyond aims at revisiting the practice of will-making, by inviting people to evaluate and sort out their belongings before passing away, and organize their legacy and executor's power with children and grandchildren. Ultimately, the service proposal aims to help overcome the emotional challenges of managing belongings in transitory life moments and limit the incumbent issues of overconsumption by leveraging on the opportunity of gifting and fostering relationships between donors and receivers.

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Introduction



In search of control

A little more than a year ago, at the dawn of this thesis, an unofficial social experiment started. New ways of living were generated under the circumstances of the Covid-19 virus spread. Uncertainty, at various degrees, pervaded the lives of people worldwide. Being confined in four walls, it seemed that the only thing we had control over was our living spaces and what was inside them. Personally, a deep curiosity towards our relationship with those things that surround us daily led me to make it the subject of this thesis. The idea of revisiting and selecting what to keep and discard from our closets and our homes has been popular for a while now. Decluttering and organization media content and self-help books provide guidance for how to do it, when and with whom, and promise that once done, one will feel rewarded. The viewpoints of three exponents, each proposing their method to tackle material belongings, The Minimalists, Marie Kondo, and Margareta Magnusson, have been reviewed to understand current suggested directions and contexts of use. Respectively, decluttering, organizing, and death-cleaning have been reviewed as particular approaches to managing things at home. Moving, throwing away, and even gifting things... as much as those actions might sound ordinary, they played the crucial role of letting people retrieve a sense of control when nothing else felt reachable. How did that happen?

Investigating practices through a multidisciplinary approach

Several approaches and fields of studies have been employed in the investigation. Researching the relevance of belongings in the process of gaining back control started in the field of anthropology. Material culture literature represented the primary source of knowledge to begin making critical considerations. Mary Douglas' work shed light on how one establishes order through binary categories. While Daniel Miller's work provided the main discussion points to critically revise faulty notions behind dedication and attachment to "stuff." Carrying out primary exploratory research with a digital-ethnographic approach allowed to gather information about people and their experiences with managing belongings jointly during the Pandemic. In-depth interviews revealed that their behaviour towards their belongings during the Pandemic was multifaceted and complex. "Practices are by definition dynamic and in constant evolution as

people adapt their actions to a multiplicity of factors: the constraints of the physical, social, regulatory and economic environment." (Broadbent, 2018, p.28) Various practices have been identified in the light of recent events or life plans they were making. Some, like Lorenzo, found themselves sorting through their childhood belongings once home, after a period living abroad. Others, such as Beatrice and Moreno, were preparing to move out of their parents' house. Serena and Luigi dedicated time to downsize and put order in their belongings before being unable to do so in the later years of life. Some, again, like Nicoletta and Ilaria, were responsible for handling the mass of belongings left by a recently passed close relative and parent, respectively.

Bits of stories from their interviews were reported as evidence of the peculiarity that more universal practices might present, and to showcase how their experiences were infused with a high degree of emotional complexity. that comes with deciding what to do with an item. Be it repurposing, discarding, or gifting, the choice coincides with revisiting and reshuffling relationships that are directly or indirectly tied to owning it. As managing belongings equals to managing ties, it can be stated that it is the materiality of objects that externalizes choices made in the social and kinship dimension. No matter how long an item has been owned, or how many memories it has associated, or where it came from, most people will find it challenging to let go of it, due to the endowment effect. (Kahneman et al., 1990). Indeed, most informants reported having tried to keep most things, or gift them to friends and family, and being emotionally challenged when thinking about having to give them up.

There are currently very limited and limiting choices for giving away unwanted belongings, primarily based on the mere functionality of things. For this reason, a paradigm shift is needed, along with an effort to amplify the spectrum of available solutions. Two co-design workshops with younger and older people shed light on their preferred giveaway modalities, and potential receivers of unwanted items, identifying non-profits and low-income countries as the most appropriate ones.

Managing the Intangible through the Tangible and vice versa

A forward-looking perspective

Addressing the challenges of those attempting to death-clean their spaces and those responsible for tackling dead relative’s belongings, the service proposal responds to the need to switch from a materialistic to an emotionally enabling model. It contributes to the continuous enhancement of the ‘bonding agency’ embedded in material things in the future. “A more profound appreciation of things will lead to a more profound appreciation of persons” (Miller, 2010)

The practice of will-making has been analysed and considered the most promising opportunity area. As families are becoming multigenerational, and the younger get established long before their grandparents have passed, the traditional way of handing down belongings is progressively disappearing. Instead, more open-ended forms of giving, including people outside of one’s family and friends’ circle, could provide a solution in redirecting unneeded but emotionally relevant belongings. Beyond, the service proposal is a platform-based service to donate material belongings and foster social ties by connecting people who need to give away personal or inherited items and those who need tangible support for maintaining a non-profit running or jumpstarting their business in low- and middle-income countries. It invites people to evaluate their belongings in advance and simultaneously organize their legacy and executor’s power with children and grandchildren. Ultimately, this thesis aims to help overcome the emotional challenges of managing belongings in transitory life moments and limit the incumbent issues of overconsumption by leveraging on the opportunity of gifting and fostering relationships between donors and receivers.

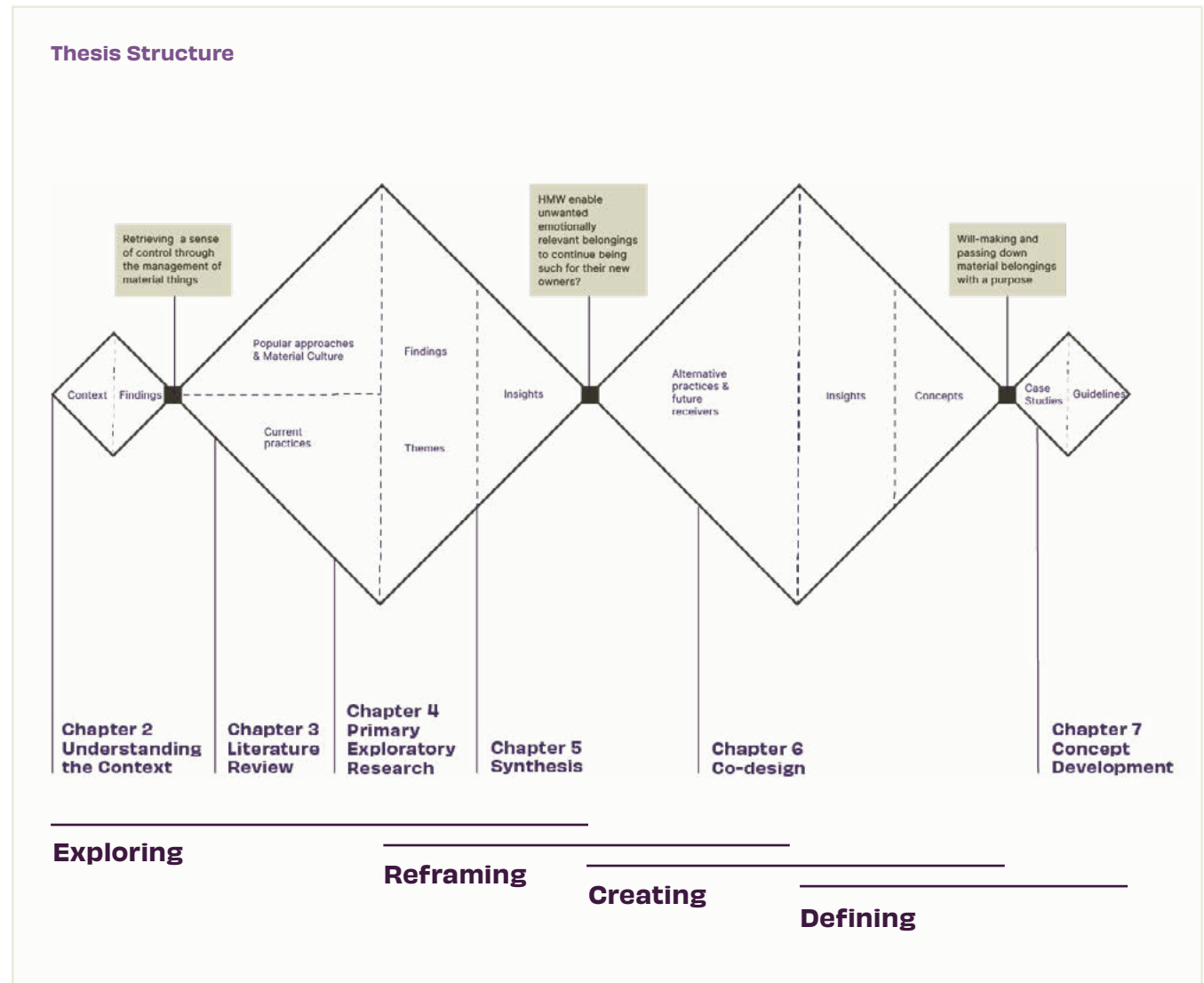


Fig. 1 Double Diamond revisited by the author, Design Council, 2014

Understanding the Context

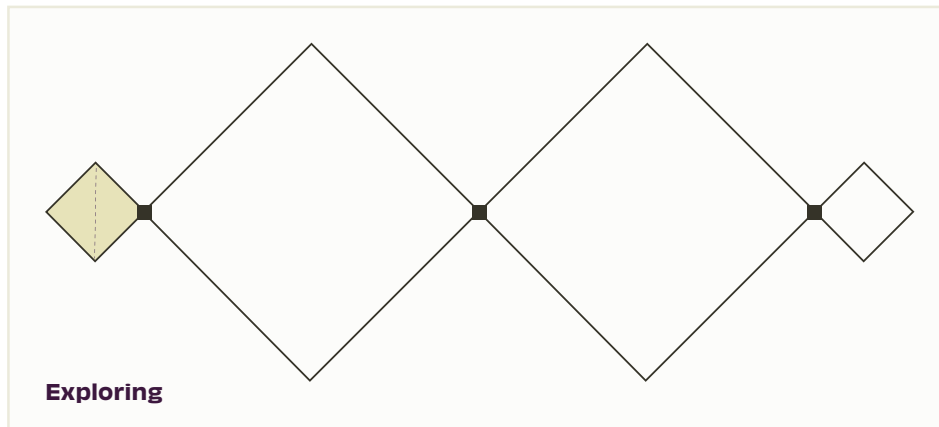
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2.1 The Pandemic's impact on Italian Society

After the spread of the novel Coronavirus, allegedly from the Chinese city of Wuhan, Italy was the first European country with a significant rise in cases. Counting from February to the end of November 2020, 1.651.229 people have been reported Covid-19 positive to the Italian National System of Integrated Surveillance. Up to the period in which this thesis is written, the spread of the disease has been considered split into three main phases: the first wave, from February to May 2020, which was characterized by a rapid increase of infections and eventually deaths in the Northern regions; the transitory phase, from June to mid-September 2020, when cases were less frequent but quickly picked up at the beginning of the fall season; and finally the second phase, starting from the end of September which saw a new rapid increase of cases.

Experts say that the country is undergoing a 'demographic crisis' that suffered an increased worsening with the advent of the Pandemic (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2020).

Demographics were impacted directly with increased mortality rates and indirectly with consequences on young people's life plans, like marriage and family formation. Given the difficult situation the country had to face, the Italian Minister for equal opportunities and family established a team of experts from academic and research institutions monitoring and working on the topic "Demography and Covid-19". This study group aims to provide citizens precise and updated data on the socio-demographic impact of the Pandemic, to keep the scientific community aware of the currently ongoing research activities, and finally to provide useful references for future policymaking (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2020).



The government quickly responded to the health emergency by ordering the closure of all non-essential activities and schools, and mandating social isolation and distancing. Guidelines for personal protection were given, and widely followed. Italians declared having washed their hands 12 times on an average weekday, 72% avoided going outside of their home daily, and 90% used facemasks when going out. According to the surveyed sample, these rules were effectively communicated by the government (86%) and useful (92%) to contrast the spread of the disease (ISTAT, 2020a).

However, it was clear how the problem could not have been solved easily and quickly, and the rules that seemed only temporarily holding back our lives became the new normal. Experts highlighted a correlation between time and the seriousness of the current containment measures' impact on lives. "The longer the pandemic will last, the more the ordinary life of the general population will be seriously affected." (Giallonardo et al., 2020, p.5) And during the first lockdown, most surveyed Italian citizens reported being aware that it would take a long time before their lives could go back to normal. The containment measures were determinant on lowering the chances of getting infected, but they also generated consequences on multiple aspects of life.

2.2 Pervading Emotional Discomfort

As the population worried about the risk of contracting the virus, additional hardships came with long a period of lockdown and diffused inactivity. People experienced emotional distress, as the deadliness of the virus seemed unstoppable, and social relations and future became uncertain. Preoccupation for job stability, salary, and family organization were also difficult to handle.

Studies are being conducted on the impact of restrictions on mental health and, by training an algorithm on acquired data about vulnerability factors, it has been predicted that 41% of the Italian population's psychological wellbeing is at risk (Open Evidence, 2020). Long term effects on mental health will be especially evident among the low-income segment of the population (Rossi et al., 2020). Comparing the Italian, Spanish and British population the highest predicted percentage at risk is that of Spain 46%, and just above Italy is the UK with 42% (Open Evidence, 2020). It has also been provided an overview of positively and negatively correlated factors with mental health vulnerability.

In Italy, specifically, the most critical vulnerability factors affecting mental health are: being forced to stay at home 77%, decrease in earning or income 55%, having to fill in an application for unemployment subsidy or government support 33%, and having to home-school children 30% (Open Evidence, 2020). Having a loved one deceased by COVID-19 was also undoubtedly a factor associated with high rates of Depression, Anxiety, Insomnia, Perceived stress, and ADS (Tor Vergata, 2020). On a sample of 18.000 Italian interviewees, 37% presented post-traumatic stress symptoms, 20% severe anxiety, 7% insomnia, 21% stress. Considering the situation, experts agree that

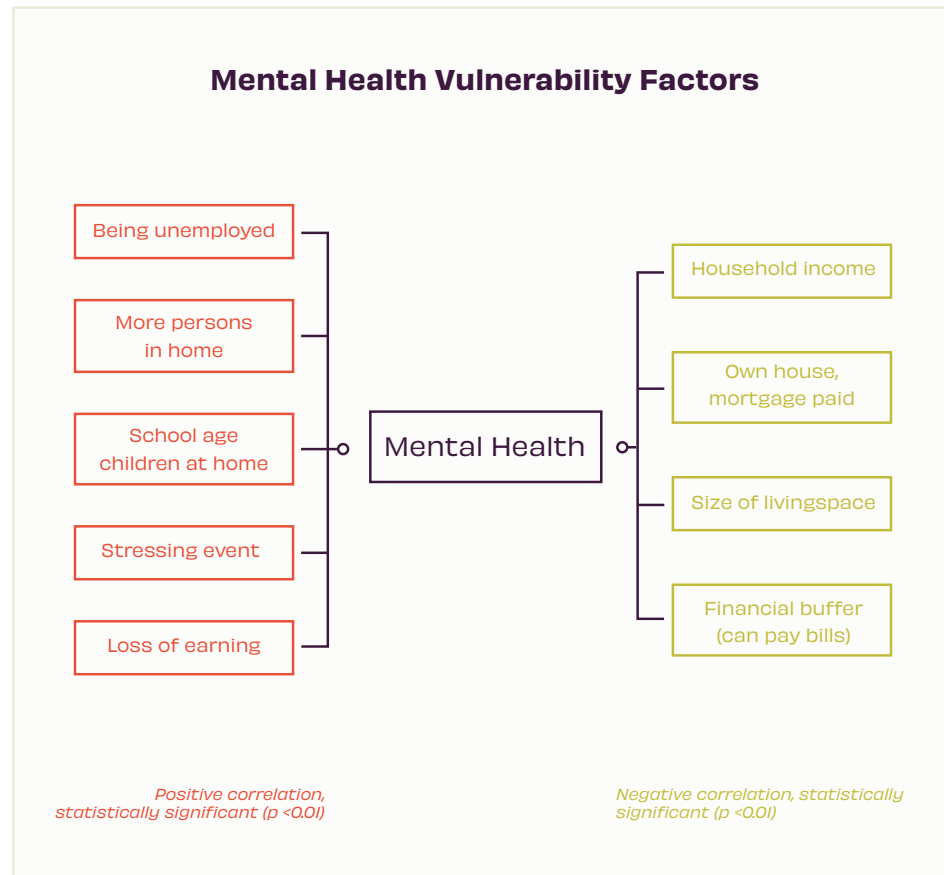


Fig. 2 Study on the effects of Covid-19 and lockdown in Italy, Spain and United Kingdom, Open Evidence, 2020

hospital staff, along with younger people, and women, in particular, are the categories that have been more severely hit on the psychological level (Rossi et al., 2020, p. 19). Doctors and nurses have been heavily affected by the organization of work, and safety and health measures. Work shifts, availability, shortage of personnel, emergencies management, daily witness of pain and suffering are all compromising the mental health of hospital staff. Unlike other health emergency scenarios, pandemics result hard to deal with because of social isolation measures, and at times discrimination, for being in close contact with infected people. Moreover, such emergency situation leads to a change in relationships with colleagues and patients as well. It has been found how feelings of anger, hostility, frustration and powerlessness are faced with increased consumption of caffeinated drinks and tobacco (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2020). The current situation is taking a toll on mental health centers, which for the first half of 2020 were physically closed. Doctor's visits at home have been guaranteed only to patients with very serious mental health disorders, while those relying on hospital assistance could not access help anymore. Hospital psychiatric counseling has dropped by 30%, individual psychotherapy by 60%, group sessions by 95% (The Executive Committee of The Italian Society of Psychiatry et al., 2020). In the Pandemic scenario, the adoption of digital devices has been crucial to contrast and minimize the negative implications of

containment measures on mental wellbeing, but it is not always possible. Experts have highlighted how increased awareness and reduction of stigma around mental issues is necessary, and involving policy makers and Italian regions to evaluate the concept of networked assistance is now mandatory (The Executive Committee of The Italian Society of Psychiatry et al., 2020).

One year later, it can be stated how the world has already been permanently affected by the adjustments enacted to contrast the spread of the virus. The post-Pandemic scenario will hardly resemble our lives before the virus. Experts state that the risk lays afterwards, when there is the chance that the future agenda will be revised downwards, emphasizing the problems that are preventing a flourishing development of the country (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2020).

2.2.1 Death

During the first wave, 211.000 people died, 50.000 more than the average in 2015–2019. Of those, 45.000 were residing in the North of the country. The increase of deaths caused almost double the deaths in March +94,5% and +75,0% in April compared to the 2015–2019 period. During the transitory phase, death rates were back to the average of the same period in 2015–2019, while during the second phase, there were 31.700 more deaths. As reported by the scientific community, especially in the first wave, age highly factored into the probability of contracting the disease. Indeed, 72% of excess deaths were of people aged 80+ years old. 23% of people aged 65–79, and in the months of March and November respectively, 11% and 4,9% excess deaths were of people aged 0–49 (ISTAT, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2020). The elderly continues being a particularly vulnerable category because a weaker immune system and previous illnesses play a significant role in increased probability for contracting the virus. Fear and anxiety are also determined by the context in which older people live, physical distance, seeing friends and peers pass away, having limited access to information sources and their living situation all greatly impact their quality of life. Living alone in particular influences levels of loneliness, and in turn loneliness depends on the degree of intolerance of uncertainty for the future. Elderly women show less tolerance of uncertainty than men (Parlapani et al., 2020).

2.2.2 Domestication

The shifts brought by the Pandemic revolutionized people's lives in a very short period. It's been humorously noted how the acronyms B.C. and A.D. could now be used to indicate life Before Coronavirus and After Domestication (The Economist, 2020). Indeed, domestication, is defined as “the process of adapting someone or the state of being adapted to domestic life” (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, n.d.). Worldwide, 97% of people live in the same house as before the Pandemic hit, but half of them declared they would move further from their work location to find a better home (Ikea, 2020). A ‘better home’ does not necessarily depend on space or the surroundings, but a change of scenery from urban to suburban contexts or small towns was something that attracted those who could afford working from home. In the Italian context, 86% of people lived in a house with outdoor space, balcony, terraces, gardens. Being confined inside for most time of the day made people appreciate balconies and terraces, which became an outlet for connecting with the outside. Playing music, singing, and offering DJ sets were ways to show solidarity towards each other. Reportedly, the majority of Italian people lived with parents, relatives, roommates or friends during lockdown, while 14% went through it alone (CILAB Creative Industries Lab, 2020). 25% of people found difficulties in making the available space work for very different needs/activities, 16% to organize and share the space with others, and 8% to

guarantee privacy. Indeed, for many, having more people around the house than usual meant lacking privacy and changed living conditions.

On one side, this could be considered an opportunity to strengthen bonds, as spending more time together left moments for laid back conversation and activities. On the other, forced cohabitation may have led to increased disagreements and in some cases generated conflicts that were not there before.

In the overall population, it has been reported how 57% of people lives with a partner or ex-partner; 15% of those states it is possible that men exert psychological violence onto women, while 9% by women onto men. Risk of physical violence is perceived by 13% of women, and by 3% of men. Overall 21% say that the quality of their romantic relationship has worsened, while 13% say so for that with their children (Humanitas San Pio X, 2020). A small percentage of those living in couple declare that there is very little collaboration and serenity at home, however, calls for help to anti-violence centres have increased by 70%, while reports to the law enforcement agency have significantly decreased (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2020). Spending several hours in a confined space, only 5% of parents state that their children have witnessed their arguments (IRPPS Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione e le Politiche Sociali, 2020). For how small that

percentage might seem, it has been found that the degree of circumstantial discomfort in parents (anxiety, mood disorders, taking anxiolytic and hypnotic pills) correlates with statistical significance to the seriousness of dysfunctional behaviour found in children (Istituto Giannina Gaslini, 2020). This happened independently from previous mental disorders in parents. 65% of children from 0 to 6 years of age are increasingly irritable and have sleeping and anxiety disorders. While 71% of those from 6 to 18 years presented somatic disorders, like feeling a lack of air, mood and sleeping disorders. Specifically it has been noted how sleep cycles in this segment of children are altered, with a tendency to develop a sort of ‘domestic jet-lag’. (Istituto Giannina Gaslini, 2020) Given the closures of all school grades and social isolation mandates for any non-essential worker and relatives, families and individuals were required to restructure not only their living spaces, but also roles and tasks.

Family life and care, informal essential jobs

Households couldn't count on grandparents' precious help anymore; therefore, a significant portion of the daytime had to be dedicated to childcare, elderly care, and house chores. With remote working and studying, living in the same house for 24 hours a day meant more to clean and keep up with than usual, compared to when living spaces were used for less than half a day. Considering the roles taken up for the house's maintenance, the gender gap was, once again, highly evident. Italian women in lockdown dedicated 18 and 35 hours a week respectively to doing chores around the house and taking care of children and nephews, against the 12 and 25 hours spent by men doing the same. Among the time spent for family matters at home, 63% went towards preparing meals, mostly by women (82% v.s. 42%) (ISTAT, 2020c).

Not only women physically worked more, but those having children between the age of 0 and 11 reported feeling tenser (25% vs. 19%), alone (19% vs. 1%), and depressed (13% vs. 2%) than men with children of the same age. Moreover, when asked to reflect upon their feelings during the forced cohabitation period, most surveyed women highlighted their tiredness, while most men expressed an increase in 'feeling useful' in the domestic and family life (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2020). Feeling entitled to having a break was also found among men, as it is seen righteous to offer them more outlets, like going outside to take care of groceries while women stay at home with children. Similarly, 27% of women and 37% of men agree that this specific period in history is an opportunity for women to "reacquire their natural role of mother and wife" (IRPPS Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione e le Politiche Sociali, 2020). On the same line, European women declared putting the health of other family members first, acting as 'health managers' for their children, partners and parents. Nevertheless, three out of four surveyed stated they also tried to cook healthier meals and doing more physical activity (AXA, 2020) to take care of themselves. Indeed, there are signs of redemption given by online networks with the aim of supporting each other, where women find relief sharing their fears and difficulties, being transparent with others in searching for a new shared identity (Manzo & Minello, 2020).

Media discourse on domestication

Coincidentally with the stay-at-home period, several projects and online contributors focused on the topic of domesticity to showcase their take on the unofficial social experiment we have been called to take part in.

Providing hits to reflect on the topic of home and domesticity was the of CasaMondo, the first digital exhibition by Maxxi Museum, curated by Domitilla Dardi and Elena Tinacci. It was entirely conceived to be enjoyed on Instagram by studio FormaFantasma. The idea behind the project is that of inviting seven internationally acclaimed designers to present their vision on seven topics revolving around life at home: homeworking, learning, care, open windows, exploring, threshold, food. The curators state how they did not want to deliver stories, but an extended research, partly historical and partly contemporary on the role of the house. This was realized by giving hints for reflection through static and animated posts from the eyes of Bêka & Lemoine, Humberto Campana, Didier Fiuza Faustino, Sou Fujimoto, Konstantin Grcic, Martí Guixé, Patricia Urquiola (Maxxi Museum, 2020).

Given that most of the time was spent at home, playfully experimenting with familiar objects became a natural pastime. The idea behind Little domestic architectures started when playing with a few things in the kitchen, joining together an egg holder, a bowl and some plants and building what looked like a research centre in the middle of a jungle. Italian architects, Marta Marotta and Fabio Cappello, founded Profferlo Architecture Collective in London and they highlight how they maintain a playful approach at work too. They conduct research on architectonic clichés, copies, DIY processes, and temporary structures. After sharing pictures of their small scale domestic constructions with friends they went on creating a photo archive, and finally opening an Instagram account. Now people from all over the world, and not only self-proclaimed creatives, contribute by sending their 'little domestic architectures'. They think about how the 'construction game' started, and remind themselves how it was probably when everything in their living spaces seemed hostile in their eyes and they just needed a change of perspective to find fun with the same things (Sbarbati, 2020).

For years, Pinterest and Instagram have been inspiring anyone interested in home decoration, organization, and DIY projects. The two social media mainly revolve around sharing pictures at times retrieved from blogs. Some of their users scroll through images to aspiring to live in a Pinterest/Instagram inspired home, while others prefer to comment on the impractical solutions that, yes, make a bedroom look like a lush tropical forest, but do not offer the best conditions to be lived in freely. Normalize normal homes is the name of an Instagram page created by a young Italian woman at the beginning of September 2020. Her posts capture how unliveable some portrayed spaces seem through ironic comments written on pictures. She thinks it is a good-humoured critic because most people do not live-in similar homes. She mentions that it is funny when you try to replicate the display of a bedroom with plants hanging on the top of your bed to achieve a 'boho feel', you realize that you will bump into those daily, it is not feasible, it is just a setting. And by sharing a picture of a messy kitchen, she wants to make every one of her followers assured that it is how most people live. Nowadays, fully living the rooms in our houses, it is even more evident how those over-thought configurations we see online are just created to look good from a certain, well-studied angle.

2.2.3 Digitalization

Work

Company owners, employers and self-employed people had to face the fact that, with high levels of uncertainty, demand decreased on a local, national, and international level. Occupation for Italians also became a concerning factor affecting the situation of families and individuals. According to an investigation conducted during the first lockdown period, 50% has a full-time job, 25% stopped working. 23% works remotely, while 10% goes to their work place (IRPPS Istituto di Ricerche sulla Popolazione e le Politiche Sociali, 2020). Companies with 50-250+ employees adopted strategies that included: reorganizing processes and spaces, accelerating the digital transition and postponing investment plans. However, small scale companies were not prepared to enable such changes, and most firms with 3-9 employees didn't adopt any strategy, while in the first lockdown 50% of surveyed small companies completely suspended their operations (ISTAT, 2020b). Remote working was only possible in certain activity sectors, therefore catering, travel, social and health care, construction, retail and wholesale companies had to face significant losses (ISTAT, 2020b).

Job security played a crucial role in determining changes in the life plans of individuals and families.

Occupation and income have been identified as the decisive factors for family planning. The difficulties that surged with the spread of the virus, indeed, negatively affected young people's life paths. Unfavourable conditions during the shift from the educational to the professional context and entering adult life could bring younger generations to limit their ambitions and focus on the present, setting aside medium- and long-term plans.

Fewer of them have been choosing to start their own family, and birth rates, which were already at their lowest since 2003, are expected to drop in 2021. In October 2020, 37% of a surveyed sample of young couples declared having postponed the choice of having a child, while 21% said they stopped thinking about it (Istituto degli Innocenti, 2020). More than half of the segment that decided to stop thinking about having a child is self-employed, living in more precarious situations. Moreover, Italian women reported having a rather pessimistic view of their occupation, salary, and family life conditions

compared to those of peers from other European countries (Istituto Giuseppe Toniolo di Studi Superiori, 2020). The low-income segment of the population could result significantly weakened and consequently decide to lower their future expectations.

Those who were lucky enough to keep working remotely expressed their preferences on how they would like to continue with teleworking, 32% felt that better technological support was needed, 30% would want a space dedicated to only doing work related tasks, 21% would like a working solution that can disappear and 21% an acoustically isolated space (CILAB Creative Industries Lab, 2020). Indeed, bringing a portion of life that is traditionally separated from the domestic environment to be conducted inside the house, meant making very different activities co-exist in a limited space. However, for some, this presented an opportunity that might be contributing to something on a larger scale. A process that is peculiar to the Italian Pandemic scenario is that of switching to 'southworking'. Working from home rules were particularly impactful for those who, years ago, started leaving their hometowns for a higher chance of occupation in the cities of Northern Italy. It's estimated that Milan, in particular, gained about 100.000 residents from other parts of Italy over 20 years (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2020). Starting from the first lockdown period the city's working hub was emptied out. Up to November 2020, it's estimated that 45.000 people have been teleworking from the South. The phenomenon has been named 'southworking' after the no-profit organization "Southworking - Lavorare dal Sud" founded by Elena Militello, a researcher from Palermo. The organization's goal is to create a support network for remote employees in the South and promote the development of suitable conditions to work with high productivity levels (Global Shapers Community Palermo, Fondazione con il Sud, 2020). In a research conducted by the organization, 80% of south workers are between 25 and 40 years old and hold university degrees in Economics, Law, and Engineering. Indeed, this is seen both as a short- and long-term opportunity to reconnect with family and relatives, and to positively contribute to and stimulate the socio-economic development of Southern regions.

Entertainment & Consumption

Studying and working from home eliminated commute time which in turn provided an opportunity to dedicate it to other pastimes or live more slowly. 27% of Italians reported having spent more time and enjoying their breakfasts, lunches and dinners. Of those, the highest percentage (41%) is made up of younger adults, 25-34 years old. Moreover, 25% of the overall population declared having eaten more food than before, and it was again young adults (40%). Trying to maintain social ties, 63% enjoyed virtual socializing with relatives, while 50% did so with friends. In both cases time spent for curating relationships increased compared to before (ISTAT, 2020c).

The domestic space transformed in a living lab where people turned to cooking, handmaking, and gardening. Some even started a home business. Preferred activities and hobbies were reading books, magazines, newspapers both digitally and physically (62%), baking bread, pizza and sweets at least once a week (53%), taking care of the house and doing maintenance work (41%), gardening (35%), sewing (17%) and finally doing DIY projects (13%) (ISTAT, 2020c). Men dedicated more time than women doing bricolage and home improvement projects (50% vs 33%). 54% enjoyed physical exercise from home, streaming videos from Youtube, Instagram or dedicated platforms. Purchases in various categories of items to conduct these activities increased: 22% purchased outdoor furniture to enjoy outdoor spaces and 12% bought gardening equipment (CILAB Creative Industries Lab, 2020). While younger people specifically (18-34 y.o.) played videogames 38%, cards 35% and group games online 32%, while 33% enjoyed singing. With travelling limitations, two main behaviours in goods consumption peaked: home delivery and hyper-local buying practices. 32% of Italians wanted a safe solution, 31% a quick one, and 22% reliability, therefore they preferred heading online to order groceries and miscellaneous products. However, 32% also stated they wanted to show support for small local businesses and therefore considered or reconsidered sellers in their neighbourhood to buy from.

2.3 Key Findings

In the light of the above discussion points, a summary of relevant findings has been elaborated. Uncertainty, and lack of control is shared by all of them, as it pervaded people's daily lives and long-term plans in multiple ways.

A sense of **impending doom** has been weighing on people's lives, bringing them to reconsider social, and kinship ties.

Younger generations have been severely affected and will have to deal with the **long-term consequences** brought by the health and economic crisis.

Feeling lack of control is leading individuals, and families to find and **act on the more manageable areas of life**, such as living spaces.

2.4 The need for Control in a disordered world

The current paragraph provides useful information to clarify the relationship between different ways of feeling in control and the relevance of the cultural setting in which it happens. Eventually the viewpoint from which the following chapters were developed is presented.

Although it is not ever possible to be in control of what happens in our lives and the external world, when something as disruptive as a Pandemic strikes, the aftermath can certainly be out of control. Now more than before it is common feeling stuck and prevented in many areas of life, but glimpses of opportunity come from thinking ahead. “Above all, we need to rapidly regain our sense of purpose, and venture out again soon to shape the world according to our intended trajectories. We must remind ourselves that we do not just live our lives, we lead them.” (Durodié, 2020a)

The importance of having a sense of agency over situations, events, things has been widely studied and control is considered a crucial factor contributing to psychological health. According to a study investigating people experiencing situations and lacking control, it has been found how there is a propensity in humans to seek and identify illusory patterns. “The need to be and feel in control is so strong that individuals will produce a pattern from noise to return the world to a predictable state.” (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008, p.117). The scholars conducting the experiment also declared that despite a realistic evaluation of one’s environment is preferable, perceiving illusory patterns may be beneficial in that it allows individuals “to psychologically engage with rather than withdraw from their environment.” (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008, p.117)

Moreover, it has been determined how reactions to confinement could be partly be determined by culture (Durodié, 2020b). Adolescents, specifically, being vulnerable and susceptible to environ-

mental changes, respond differently to disease-control regulations according to their learning-style. Sense of control can be defined as the idea that environmental hardships can be overcome (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008). According to a recent study, sense of control might increase in collectivistic cultures, and decrease in individualistic ones. Dutch, social psychologist Geert Hofstede elaborated a series of parameters to measure the level of individualism and collectivism of different countries. According to his view, Italy is a highly individualistic country along with most of European and Anglo-Saxon ones (Hofstede, 1980). In individualistic countries problem-solving approaches encourage the act of independently seeking innovative solutions, deriving sense of control from exerting freedom; while collectivistic countries solve issues through social learning, collaborating and building on each other’s ideas to fight uncertainty. In the current situation, people having little to no degree of agency on

As fear levels rise, it is normal for people to focus on personal security and safety. We tend to withdraw, become more self-serving and more defensive. We focus on smaller and smaller details, those things we can control. It becomes more difficult to work together and nearly impossible to focus on the bigger picture. (Wheatley, 2007, 117)

the spread of the virus, have been adapting and finding other ways of retrieving a sense of control over their surroundings. «As fear levels rise, it is normal for people to focus on personal security and safety. We tend to withdraw, become more self-serving and more defensive. We focus on smaller and smaller details, those things we can control. It becomes more difficult to work together and nearly impossible to focus on the bigger picture.» (Wheatley, 2007, p.117)

Lacking control and freedom to conduct life as it was before the Pandemic, it became common to rely on the domestic dimension to gain back a sense of control. Our living spaces became opportunity territories where something to act upon could certainly be found. Indeed, acting on personal belongings and making a few changes was enough to allow people to restore a sense of agency over something so little, yet so important in 2020, and foreseeably in 2021.

2.4.1 Research Questions

Given the above-mentioned considerations, the focus of the following chapter will be on the material dimension that provided a fundamental anchor point for peoples' daily lives.

Why are material items useful in retrieving a sense of control?

What, in particular, sparks the need to act upon material items?

In which ways are people managing their belongings to achieve control?

Does decluttering represent a solution to the current pervading feeling of uneasiness?

3

Literature Review

The current chapter draws from material culture and social sciences literature works to lay out the foundations of what it means to handle material items to retrieve control. It then presents a brief description and critical analysis of four different, popular approaches for tackling personal belongings in the household. Lastly, the insights that guided following reflections are highlighted.

3.1 Retrieving Control

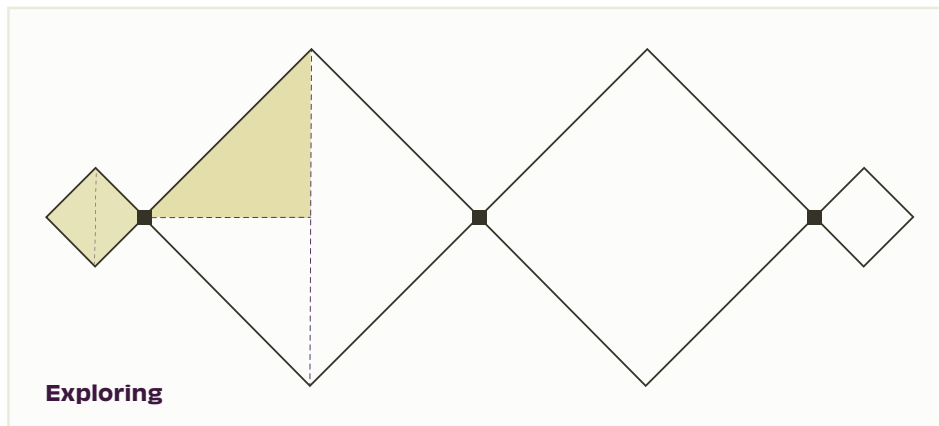
3.1.1 A closer Look at Dirt

Retrieving a sense of control through the domestic dimension has been a common process for households worldwide. But how does it happen? And what does it take to feel in control by handling the material objects we have in our homes? British anthropologist, Mary Douglas' theory on dirt could provide elements to further understand and frame the phenomenon of acting on built environment to gain back a sense of control in our lives.

Although her book "Purity and Danger: an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo", first published in 1966, explores the rules of purity through the lens of anthropology applied to various religions, primitive and modern cultures, it reveals a valuable source to understand dirt across multiple contexts. As discussed in her book, our concept of dirt has been limited to thinking of it as dust and germs from when the bacterial transmission of disease was discovered in the nineteenth Century; but "if we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966/2002).

The author explains that the universe is organized in binary categories, and states that "Reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death. Wherever ideas of dirt are highly structured their analysis discloses a play upon such profound themes" (Douglas, 1966/2002).

In fact, when scrubbing and dusting, we are not striving to achieve a germ-free space; cleaning entails acknowledging that something is misplaced and, therefore, anomalous. To try and restore order, we intentionally need to place things in the categories in which they belong. "For I believe that ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function



to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created.” (Douglas, 1966/2002) Douglas’ ideas abstract from the concept of cleaning and disinfecting, and conceptualize those practices as, first, acknowledging that something is ‘out of place’, and then acting upon it by categorizing it.

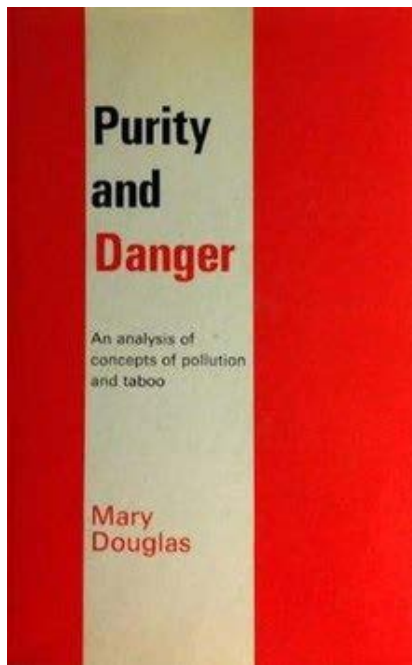


Fig. 1 Purity and Danger book cover, 1966

3.1.2 Fitting and Unfitting, Wanted and Unwanted

According to Douglas’ theory, recognizing that something is out of place entails critically assessing the situation, that is, considering what pertains to one class and its opposite, and subsequently acting on it to re-establish order. “As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. [...] Dirt offends against order.” In this statement, other than expressing how dirt is relative to each person that considers it, Douglas mentions how dirt is a threat to order and adds an important layer to our understanding of people’s behavior these last few months, that is “the danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power.” (Douglas, 1966/2002)

Living in uncertainty during a global pandemic and spending most time at home led people to reflect more on their living spaces and possessions and made them aware of those less-lived and used objects and clothes.

Those items that, to the eyes of their owner, have crossed boundaries and have become either unfitting and/or unwanted, are now the embodiment of power in their ability to break current patterns inside the house. This is why, in Douglas’ words, “though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power” (Douglas, 1966/2002).

The potentiality embedded in those deemed unfitting and unwanted objects is fully

achieved when people take a stance and place them in their pertaining category. What has been happening from the beginning of the first lockdown period to achieve that ‘semblance of order’ can be exemplified by two different phenomena.

Though we seek to create order, we do not simply condemn disorder. We recognise that it is destructive to existing patterns; also that it has potentiality. It symbolises both danger and power. (Douglas, 1966/2002)

3.1.3 Re-arranging

An unspoken recognition towards disorder is certainly characterizing our ways of spending free time in lockdown periods. It has been reported how people worked for the reorganization and rearrangement of objects and furniture around their house (Kaysen, 2020). This was especially beneficial to those working from home, who wanted to draw a clear line between personal and working space (Anicich et al., 2020). Moving things around our spaces these past months, might coincide to what Douglas defines ‘making unity of experience’. “In chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea. There is nothing fearful or unreasoning in our dirt-avoidance: it is a creative movement, an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience.” (Douglas, 1966/2002). ‘Making unity of experience’ could, indeed, be translated as moving things according to our own set of binary categories of fitting and unfitting. When managing our possessions we might

realize that we do not enjoy having the couch in front of the window anymore, to us, it is unfitting, and the couch, threatening the order, is now embodying power. Therefore, we start experimenting different layouts to find a satisfying solution. At that point, everything is in order again. As found in one of her field work studies in the South of Norway, anthropologist Pauline Garvey comments on the furniture re-arrangement process in one of her informants’ living room: “With the manipulation of her environment, Lise reorders her feelings and draws comparisons between the mental and physical forms of organization. Through her involvement in these routines, she exerts a feeling of agency over her emotions. Her home is not incidental but holds a dynamic, even interactive, role in this process” (Miller, 2001). In this case, the method for tackling disorder sees the modification of the environment by displacing objects and furniture. During the process, the informant enjoys acting upon her belongings, as the power held by those in the moment of ‘disorder’ makes her feel in control of the situation.

3.1.4 Discarding

The second currently popular practice aimed at retrieving control over, at least, a part of our lives, is that of disposal of several personal objects, clothes, appliances laying around the house. By living, working, exercising, socializing at home from morning to night, people started to consider their belongings and classifying their possessions as wanted and unwanted, and it became such a frequent practice that donation centers were overflowing from unmanageable quantities of stuff (Koncius, 2020). To cite Douglas again, “Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.” (Douglas, 1966/2002) For example, when we realize that a toaster has been sitting at the bottom of the kitchen cabinet unused for years, the object is itself threatening our idea of order. By eliminating it together with more stuff around the house, order is achieved. This is another way of imposing order, following the system that stems out of our personal binary categories of wanted and unwanted.

According to Douglas’ perspective on dirt, this process is an actualization of the effort to establish order in our spaces. The will to feel in control of something, and exercising it through actions on material things, derives from the fact that, as Douglas claims, “dirt is created by the differentiating activity of the mind.” Indeed, dirt is relative and exists in the eye of the beholder.

Historically, dirt, in the sense of clutter, emerged as a concept during the Victorian period. In her Book of Household Management, Isabella Beeton states “a place for everything and everything in its place” (Beeton, 1861/1982) referring to the fact that new systems of production required new systems of order. These new systems of order also started including the option of discarding things.

As noted by Susan Strasser, in her book “Waste and Want: a social history of trash” (1999), before the rise of mass production in the Western world, most things were reused, and waste was little to nonexistent. People were unlikely to throw away anything unless nothing could be made out of it. In fact, most

people made a living out of being “bricoleurs”, which French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his book “The savage mind” (1970), described as the man who works with his hands to create something new only by reusing and repurposing scraps, leftovers and unwanted materials. Trash was burnt to heat houses and dinners, food scraps fed animals and clothing was used until damaged and then fixed or transformed into something else, as Strasser noted, the process was cyclical (Strasser, 1999). However, a few decades into the twentieth Century it evolved into a linear process. “Toward the end of the nineteenth Century, disposal became separate from production and, Americans’ relationship to waste was fundamentally transformed. Trash and trashmaking became integral to the economy in a wholly new way: the growth of markets for new products came to depend in part on the continuous disposal of old things” (Strasser, 1999). In the post-war world, when the advent of industrialization and lower prices started to allow people to dispose of almost anything,

accumulation of waste became a problem. “During the forty or so years around the turn of the twentieth Century, mass production and mass distribution created unprecedented quantities of trash that disturbed private citizens and plagued city administrations.” (Strasser, 1999)

By following Douglas’ binary categories and boundaries’ theory, she also highlights how the process of trash making is deeply intertwined to the concept of physical boundaries. “As a normal household process, disposal may be understood to involve the literal, spacial interface between the private and the public. Some time after they are purchased and brought home, parts of food, clothing, appliances, cleaning products, and other household goods (the parts that are not literally consumed) are removed beyond the borders of the household. Nontrash belongs in the house; trash gets put outside.” (Strasser, 1999, p.8)



Fig. 2 ‘Waste Not’ exhibition, Jane Hobson, 2012

3.1.5 Materialism and Consumption

As mentioned in the last paragraph, the problematization of waste is relatively recent. But even more so is the problematization around the topic of materialism and consumption. Materialism is defined as a “set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one’s life” (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 308) The attribution of such importance has been related to various causes, such as wanting to fill a psychological void. For example, finally being able to provide for one’s family after years of living in poverty. Chinese artist Song Dong raised awareness on his mother’s depression, caused by her husband’s death, bringing her to becoming a serial hoarder. In his exhibition, Dong reported a concept generated in communist China, ‘wu jin qi yong’ or ‘waste not.’ The issue of waste from the environmental point of view only constitutes the superficial layer of his thought-provoking work. Instead, it is the personal element brought by the artist, his mother’s condition and her relationship to her the objects she has been collecting that invite one to think.

According to theorists, being exposed to media sources and advertising, also causes to buy more and fall into the trap of materialism and consumerism. (Kasser, 2014) The use of the word ‘trap’ is not accidental, indeed a growing discourse on the negative effects of consumption and engagement with material things has been developing among scholars. The way in which we consume and quickly dispose of material things has been condemned as the leading cause of the many problems we face today, including the loss and

degradation of personal relationships (Bauer et al., 2012). Specifically, about interpersonal relationships, consumer research experts have been supporting the idea of how materialistic values are a threat to collective-oriented ones, such as family and religious values. (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002) The findings of a study on consumption cues presented a similar outcome by highlighting an increased level of competitiveness in those withholding materialistic values: “the materialistic mind-set orients the individual to competitive concerns about relative standing, producing corresponding feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction, and disinclination to trust other people and engage with them in deep, collaborative ways.” (Bauer et al., 2012, p.522) The negative impact of materialism on the relational dimension is also reported on that with the self. Indeed, it is believed that the conflict between materialist and collectivist values creates tension in the person resulting in a lower degree of individual well-being, with higher reported depression and anxiety rates. (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002) In short, the scholarly discourse of the past decades focused on strongly highlighting the negative connotations revolving around the involvement with, appreciation and engagement in buying and owning material things. Reconnecting with the discourse on control, it can be said that, as the supposedly negative impact theory of enjoying possessions expanded to reach the citizens of the world, a new cultural norm was generated. People started being expected to dispose of things and quantities of unfit-

ting and unwanted objects increased. And this happened with consequences on daily lives and practices. In fact, being convinced about the oppressive power of buying and owning things led people to believe that embracing a ‘less is more’ mindset in home decoration, apparel, and possessions would grant a more meaningful and satisfactory life. To achieve this, many started their own process of managing and eliminating possessions. This often resulted overwhelmingly difficult, in fact, a rise in popularity of guides helping in the process of disposal followed.



Fig. 3-5 ‘Waste Not’ exhibition, Jane Hobson, 2012

3.1.6 Guided Organization & Disposal

After having tried to tackle an intense clean out of their rooms by themselves, foreseeing it as an unachievable goal or simply not having the time, many households resorted to the services offered by professional organizers. In 20 years (1995–2016), the National Association of Professional Organizers has seen a growth in members' of almost 400 percent (napo.net, n.d.). The idea of being able to unlock a door to success and happiness became so engrained that, in a study conducted with professional organizers, informants proceeded to highlight how their role is not only that of a service provider, but also of a gift donor (Belk et al., 2007). Besides professional organizers, an alternative way to achieve a clutter-free and empowering space has become quite popular. Suggesting ways to better one's condition by tackling living spaces has been the focus of many recent publications, commonly known as self-help books and blogs. According to the Merriam Webster online dictionary 'self-help' is "the coping with one's personal or emotional problems without professional help." (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, 2021) As it can be deduced, the support offered by professional organizers and self-help editorial products is different. They can be understood as mentorship models that differ from the kind of engagement they require. Hiring a professional organizer that is physically there might make one more passive in the process, leaving work in the hands of the expert. While reading a self-help book might require a more active commitment and in-

ternalization of the proposed concepts over time. Moreover, differently from individual professional organizers, it could be said that authors of self-help books establish quite a distinctive discourse around material possessions. In turn, in some cases, that school of thought that is peculiar of self-help gurus is then translated into a well-positioned brand. Given the rise in interest in this kind of publications by the general public, many authors suggest ways of dealing with belongings providing lifestyle tips not only through self-help books, but also TV and online series, personal blogs, podcasts and Instagram accounts.

What they all have in common ties back to the now widely accepted belief condemning materialism. Indeed, the negative discourse around materiality expands to include notions of happiness and fulfilment related to having less.

Given the variety of approaches that emerged in the last ten years, the following pages are dedicated to the description and critical comparison of selected self-help authors and their methods aimed at achieving a more satisfactory life through the management of material things.

The approaches have been identified by three terms aimed at portraying and synthesizing the mindset that each spokesperson advertises. 'Minimizing & Discarding', includes 'The Minimalists' duo and Marie Kondo; 'organizing', represents the 'The Home Edit' duo; and finally 'preserving' stands for the Swedish death cleaning method of Margareta Magnusson.

The Minimalists

The first two approaches belong to the so-called minimalism movement, which out of all the methods presupposes that only by finding essentiality one can reach physical and mental wellbeing. In fact, at the basis of minimalism is the concept that only by having less you will have 'personal more', time, relationships, and ultimately happiness (Meissner, 2019). The Minimalists, an American male duo, are well known for their website, a blog, and multiple books and Netflix documentaries. Their project started in 2010 and is entirely dedicated to telling the story which brought them from wealthy corporate employees to minimalists living in various countries worldwide, until now, when they both settled in Los Angeles. They state how before becoming minimalists they were not happy with their lifestyle and by looking for a way to live simply they "discovered a group of people without a lot of things but with myriad happiness, passion, and freedom. [They] yearned for the same." (Joshua Fields Millburn, 2010, -b) Coherently, even their website and blog's layout follows minimalist principles. Each post is correlated with one black and white photo that sits under the title, and the rest of the content is made of text that fills a narrow central column. In these posts, they share the ups and downs of their life via blog entries, and talk about the minimalist choice as a revelation. To start the process of living with less, a 21 day-by-day schedule is laid out on a website post. (Joshua Fields Millburn, 2010 -b) Each day has a dedicated text paragraph which presents the duo's view on a topic such as 'decisions', 'planning', 'packing', 'essentials'... They describe their past experience with those, and invite readers to reflect and decide for themselves according to their current needs. The duo offers free resources and highlights how the minimalist life should be accessible to everybody, but they also have a Patreon channel (Millburn & Nicodemus, n.d.), which allows access to 'private podcasts' with a \$2, \$5 or \$8 monthly fee and is open to a limited number of fans.

Approach: Minimizing & Discarding



Fig. 6 Frame from the movie "The Minimalists: a documentary about the important things", 2015

Konmari

Analog to the previous approach but integrated by Japanese culture features is the method of Japanese professional organizer, Marie Kondo. She was undoubtedly responsible for paving the way to a long list of home-organization gurus, who following her path and ideology, are now recognized as 'decluttering icons' in mainstream media. With the publishing of Kondo's first book in 2011 in Japan, and in 2014 in the U.S., "The life-changing magic of tidying up: The Japanese art of decluttering and organizing," interest in cleaning-out and home organizing activities grew massively in the Western world as well. Her clean-out and organizational method is based on the concept that if your possessions do not 'spark joy', you should part with them. The dimension on which she focuses is strictly individual, highlighting how, by letting go of things that do not bring happiness in our daily lives, we can better connect to our authentic self. She also reinforces how during the process one should think about themselves only, envisioning their goals and decluttering accordingly. Children should also be taught how to care for their belongings and keep them organized, so that each family member knows and is responsible for what the totality of possessions present in the house. Kondo's method was so well accepted that more books, a graphic novel, a Netflix docuseries, and an e-commerce (KonMari Media, Inc., 2019) selling home organization and interior decorations have been created under her name. Despite critics towards her e-commerce website for being contradictory in respect to her philosophy, her brand continues to grow.

Approach: Minimizing & Discarding

The Home Edit

Focusing solely on the organization of belongings is the American female duo of Netflix show "The Home Edit", whose goal is to help clients "lead the low-guilt life" and assure them that "[they] don't have to live like a minimalist to feel happy and calm." (Shearer & Teplin, 2019) The show features both celebrity and ordinary people's homes highlighting how there is not much difference in living spaces' messiness level despite what one does for a living. At the center of their method is the assessment of quantity and typology in one's room and the choice of the best containers and organizers to make it easier to know where everything is when it is needed. Moreover their approach focuses on teaching organization and making it accessible to children through clear bins, containers, and easy to read labels, rather than discarding objects. Similarly to Marie Kondo they created a popular product line that is exclusively sold at American retailer "The Container Store" (The Container Store - The Home Edit exclusive collection, 2019).

Approach: Organizing

Swedish Death Cleaning

Finally, the "Swedish Death Cleaning" method stands out all of the aforementioned, as it precisely frames cleaning-out as an activity to use to look ahead. In her first published book, "The gentle art of Swedish Death Cleaning" Swedish writer, Margareta Magnusson, suggests readers to get rid of those items around the house that will not be useful and meaningful to the future generation that will inherit them, and to do it as soon as possible, so as to have less work by the end of life (Magnusson, 2017). Döstädning, Swedish for 'death cleaning,' is a common practice in Sweden, and Magnusson wrote the book as she was going through the process herself, after the death of her mother and then that of her husband in order to downsize and live in a smaller apartment in Stockholm. She clearly states that 'döstädning' is a way of permanently organizing things to make daily life more comfortable. It is a practice that needs to be carried out discretely, over the course of months and even years. Its ultimate goal is to enable people to leave the world with a plan, saving loved ones some valuable time when they will have to deal with one's possessions and simultaneously gently enriching dear friends and family houses with nice and meaningful things. The collective dimension in this decluttering approach is also reinforced by the idea of preliminary sorting out the most important items, and then inviting friends and family to take what they might need. She also adds how, while one is still alive, they should be telling the story and memories attached to their items, finding unique ways to let go of things and ensuring that what they give away has an added value. In that case, Magnusson highlights how one should not expect that the present will be owned by that same person forever, and they should not feel guilty for not keeping something that was gifted to them but is not appreciated.

Approach: Minimizing & Preserving

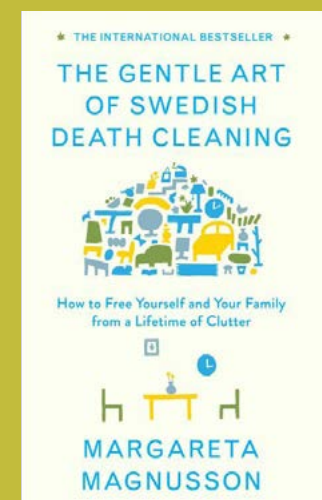


Fig. 7 "The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning" book cover, 2017

The Minimalists	Konmari	Swedish Death Cleaning	The Home Edit
<p style="text-align: center;">Minimizing & Discarding</p> <p>Lifestyle blog with the aim of helping people “question what things add value to their lives.” “By clearing the clutter from life’s path, we can all make room for the most important aspects of life: health, relationships, passion, growth, and contribution.” (Millburn, 2016)</p>	<p>Clean-out and organizational method based on Japanese principles, and on the individual dimension. Highlighting how letting go of things that do not bring happiness in daily life allows for better connection to the authentic self.</p> <p>Identify the only items that truly spark joy and eliminate the rest to reset the space</p> <p>Mindful communication with the house and items it stores</p> <p>Thank the house and the things it stores before starting. Touch every item and ask the question ‘Does it spark joy??</p> <p>Make the whole family learn about tidying and selecting items, so to make them independent.</p> <p>Any time</p> <p>Fold clothing items by minimizing the space they take up and make them always visible</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Minimizing & Preserving</p> <p>‘Döstädning’ means organizing and sorting through possessions to discern what to keep for the coming generations, leaving the world with a plan and saving loved ones time.</p> <p>Avoid burdening the next generation with accumulated belongings</p> <p>Slow and gentle process</p> <p>Start with storage areas, as they have been out of sight. Find unique ways to give away unwanted items and tell their story.</p> <p>Involve friends and family, tell them stories of items, let them come to pick up anything they would like.</p> <p>From 50s/60s onwards</p> <p>Do not start with old letters and photographs</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Organizing</p> <p>Organisational method to help clients “lead the low-guilt life” ensuring that “[they] don’t have to live like a minimalist to feel happy and calm.” (Shearer & Teplin, 2019)</p>

Through their editorial content, each of these self-help guides’ authors give various tips to those looking for a mentor in how to manage their belongings.

It is clear how there is a growing discourse on what our relationship with material things should look like, and our bookshelves have been filling up with multiple books and guides on how to coexist with things. The reasons behind getting rid of things might come from various points of view, but all of these methods imply that only by acknowledging and taking a stance on the material possessions surrounding us at home we can live a fulfilling life. The second half of the current chapter is dedicated to an in-depth review of the aforementioned methods through the critical lens offered by the material culture approach.

Tab. 3 Methods Comparison, elaborated by the author

3.2 Reviewing methods through the Material Culture approach

3.2.1 Coexisting with Stuff

As mentioned previously, acknowledging, and facing the stuff surrounding us in the domestic space became a common practice for those wishing to gain control during the Pandemic period. Moreover, it has been explained how the appeal of clean-outs originates from the negative connotation around materiality that has been establishing for a few decades in the Western world.

But what does it take to feel in control and satisfied with the quantity and quality of things that surround us at home? Can material things be condemned for holding back our lives and social relationships?

These questions might find an answer through Daniel Miller's material culture disruptive approach. As an anthropologist, he believes that 'stuff' is important, but it's not to be seen as a static representation of its owner, rather as an active determinant that implicitly drives them. By stressing this concept, he also defines what material culture is according to his view: "Objects are important, not because they are evident and physically constrain or enable, but often precisely because we do not 'see' them. The less we are aware of them the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behaviour, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so. Such a perspective seems properly described as 'material culture' since it implies that much of what we are, exists not through our consciousness or body, but as an exterior environment that habituates and prompts us." (Miller, 2005) With a similar perspective, British Anthropologist, Victor Buchli comments on prior ways of considering material possessions by other colleagues and states how: "the artifacts of the home do not function as diagnostic material culture; they are not signifying as earlier linguistic or fossil metaphors would have it. Rather, they are the raw material, the stuff, the means by which sensuous creative flows of

activity can take place whereby selfhood is produced within a given moral economy of such flows." (Buchli, 2013)

Both scholars underline the role that material possessions play in defining individuals, but Miller adds on a further layer that concerns interpersonal relationships. Through the many publications covering the topic of material things, Miller is determined to debunk the "myth of materiality" which he described in his book, "The Comfort of Things", as the faulty idea that attachment to material things implies the impoverishment of authentic personal relationships (Miller, 2009). On the contrary, he believes that consumption and possessions can reinforce and better develop the relationships that we have with others, as well as the one with ourselves. Most of Miller's findings and conceptualizations are the result of many years spent in direct contact with the various populations of the world.

Indeed, as an anthropologist, he aims to make a difference by heavily relying on ethnographic studies to learn about the material aspect of people's daily lives in different socio-cultural contexts. Despite the importance of material culture theory, he believes that understanding what happens at the local level is crucial. According to Miller, a good anthropologist is "someone who seeks to demonstrate the consequences of the universal for the particular, and of the particular for the universal by equal devotion to the empathetic understanding and encompassment of both." (Miller, 2010) By living with people, he reaches his goal of uncovering what has always been there but has never been seriously considered because too common and too ordinary. In fact, in a recent study on blue jeans, ethnographic findings brought him to conceptualize the idea of the blindingly obvious as something that "suggests that some things are so evident, so ubiquitous and taken for granted that they are indeed blinding. That in taking them for granted we find it more difficult to take them seriously or as important evidence for the nature of what we have uncovered." (Miller & Woodward, 2007) Miller and his collaborators uncovered stories and behaviors that led to enriching existing literature with insights providing uncommon but strongly backed up considerations on materiality. In particular, his findings provide evidence that particularly contrasts with the Western idea that someone who appre-

ciates material things is superficial (Miller, 2010). Moreover, by making examples of the importance of material things in Eastern religions, Miller shows the paradox and intrinsic contradiction of materiality by stating: “the more humanity reaches towards the conceptualization of the immaterial, the more important the specific form of its materialization.” (Miller, 2010, p. 75) This brief overview of Miller’s material culture approach already calls attention to the differences and similarities in views with those from the aforementioned self-help guides. What the next paragraphs will present is a detailed review of the described organizational and clean-out methods through the material culture lens. The aim is to review the founding concepts of the proposed approaches and

The more humanity reaches towards the conceptualization of the immaterial, the more important the specific form of its materialization.
(Miller, 2010, 75)

critically assess them. Two main tendencies can be evidenced among the four methods. On one side, ‘The Minimalists’ and Marie Kondo stress the importance of eliminating things for individual wellbeing. While the organizational and decluttering tips of ‘The Home Edit’ and ‘döstädning’ focus on the collective dimension of the practice, with the Swedish method in particular, on how the decisions taken around possessions will guarantee the wellbeing of future generations. Given their highly distinctive traits, ‘Konmari’ and ‘Swedish Death Cleaning’ will represent respectively the individualist and the collectivist approach.

3.2.2 Minimalism and the Depth Ontology

Miller’s point of view on the implications around material possessions is completely opposite to that of the minimalism narratives described in the previous paragraph. Indeed, ‘The Minimalists’ duo advocates for getting rid of material objects and that acquiring experiences such as travels, concerts, vacations with friends and family is much more fulfilling than buying things (Joshua Fields Millburn, n.d.-c). The minimalism mindset particularly condemns quantity. “[Minimalism] narratives presuppose that ‘too much’ is, above all, a problem that affects people on a personal level, and invite individuals to make emotionally-driven choices on how to commit or consume differently in order to counteract ‘too much.’” (Meissner, 2019) But when is it enough to divest of things? What is it that will be uncovered once most belongings get disposed? Only when close to nothing is left in the house and in the closet, minimalists believe that they can finally find their ‘true inner self’ and can dedicate their time to ‘experiences’. But this purity and authenticity will never be reached because nothing lays deep inside when every outer layer is eliminated. According to Miller, believing that things are oppressing our lives, cluttering our thoughts, and robbing us of personal time to dedicate to loved ones and personal development is flawed. “The idea that stuff somehow drains away our humanity, as we dissolve into a sticky mess of plastic and other commodities, is really an attempt to retain a rather simplistic and false view of pure and prior unsullied

humanity.” (Miller, 2010, p. 5) Indeed, he argues how the Western world lives by a ‘depth ontology’, firmly believing that only when you take off the outer material layers that cover a person, such as clothes and objects, you can see who they truly are. It is common to be told that the ‘real person’ and its values lie beneath their exterior appearance, and by analogy and almost automatically those who take strong interest in presenting themselves with a certain flair are deemed as shallow. In countries with a long history of institutionalization, Miller highlights how the physical and economic status of a person at birth defines them for the rest of their lives and being natural equals to being deep. By reporting an ethnographic study he conducted by living in a Trinidadian village,

The idea that stuff somehow drains away our humanity, as we dissolve into a sticky mess of plastic and other commodities, is really an attempt to retain a rather simplistic and false view of pure and prior unsullied humanity.
(Miller, 2010, 5)

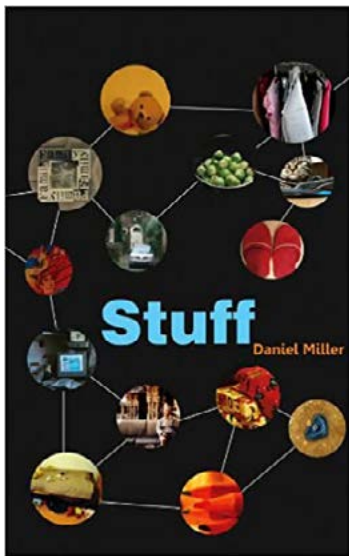


Fig. 8 “Stuff” book cover, 2010

Miller understands how Trinidadians, being an egalitarian society, have been using apparel as a way of developing their sense of self. They judge each other, not at birth, but by labor and effort. And material things are the means through which they exert this agency in the process. Field research in another setting of ethnographic research, India, revealed how the Sari, traditional garment for women, because of the way it is made, requires skills and constant engagement to keep it on. Miller highlights how the Sari is used to mediate interaction with others. With men specifically, when the continuous adjustment of the fabric during movements

draws attention to certain body parts. With babies, when they play and hide behind the ‘pallu’, the hanging part over the shoulder. The wearer masters the art of wearing a Sari through the years, and comes to use it as an instrument of power. Through these findings, the anthropologist highlights how there are multiple metaphors surrounding material things, and what we wear on our body is not superficial, but rather a means to constitute the self. (Miller, 2010) The concept of the person is here formed through those things that, according to minimalists, hold back our lives and constrain instead of enabling.

3.2.3 The Humility of Things and Tokimeku

Marie Kondo showcases proof of how decluttering following ‘Konmari’ has an almost therapeutic effect by listing some of her clients’ life changing events succeeding the process, such as losing weight, being more productive and launching new businesses (Kond & Hirano, 2014). Once again, according to this minimalism-driven approach, the disposal of material things seems to determine a better life. The distinctive traits of Kondo’s decluttering method include a deep physical and mental engagement and acknowledgment of material things. In fact, one becomes a master of ‘Konmari’ when they gain skillfulness in feeling the deep emotion that prompts from the inside when getting in touch with the essence of thin-

gs, animate, and inanimate ones. ‘Mono no aware’ is the poetic term that describes this capacity and was formulated by Japanese philologist Motoori Norinaga (Flowers, 2020). Another fundamental notion is that of tokimeku, “a palpitation or response of the heart. It usually results from the experience of anticipation, or during an encounter with the object of one’s affection. Tokimeku also refers to the phenomenological response of the kokoro, the “heart/mind,” to affective encounters with the world.” Kondo stresses the importance of physically touching each item before asking the tedious question ‘does it spark joy?’, depending on the response of the kokoro one will know what to do with their possessions. Ideally, each owned item should be assessed alone and in silence, to help with gaining consciousness about an object’s function in the present moment. The focus must be strictly on the present and the author highlights how the past is not useful, linking a component of Japanese aestheticism to her method, which presupposes that all items come to the end of their life, and thus become disposable. After decluttering, the organization of one’s belonging is even more important, as Kondo states “I believe that when we put our things in order and strengthen our bonds with what we own, we get back in touch with that delicate sensitivity to mono no aware. We rediscover our innate capacity to cherish the things in our lives and regain the awareness that our relationship with the material world is one of mutual support.” (Kondo & Hirano,

2014) The above listed practices derive from multiple religious traditions, such as Shinto, Buddhism, and cultural concepts from Zen, Feng-shui and Aestheticism. Commenting on South Asian religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism, Miller underlines how “theology has been centered on the critique of materiality”, however religions themselves have always made use of material things to demonstrate the opposite (Miller, 2005). He highlights how, paradoxically, “even within the most secular and self-consciously modern systems of belief the issue of materiality remains foundational to most people’s stance to the world.” (Miller, 2005)

This desire for finding the essential and locating it in material objects is not contemplated in Miller’s material culture. Indeed, he believes that things are a frame for our existence and their power lays in being ignored most times. Indeed, what Miller tries to put forward is that we should not really give so much importance to our belongings, indeed it is their obviousness and ordinariness that actually determine our lives. The author formulated the concept of the ‘humility of things’ drawing upon the concepts found in the book “Frame Theory” (1975), by sociologist Goffman, and “The Sense of Order” (1979) by art historian Gombrich. The first demonstrated how, we unconsciously pick up signals and cues from the context, people, things, animals, in which we are situated and act upon those. Continuing on this thread, Gombrich stated that when a frame is appropriate



Fig. 9 Indian Women wearing Sari, Ivy Aralia Nizar, 2020

one doesn't notice it and can fully appreciate the art that is inside it because it seamlessly transfers the meaning to the viewer, while when it's inappropriate the frame becomes evident. Material things are subtle shapers, but the continuous preoccupation with what is inside our homes doesn't allow things to exercise their 'humility'. "The art of tidying is really the art of curating, as forensic culling ultimately produces aesthetic bliss: the de-cluttered space becomes a shrine to joy." (Kondo & Hirano, 2014) If one focuses on eliminating things as soon as they are marked as 'not-joy-sparking', stuff loses its agency, power and potentiality because those are not embedded in objects themselves but are revealed once they are used and become agents for self-determination. Aiming for purity by creating a sacred space, similarly to searching for depth and authenticity, means striving for something that does not exist. Finally, to compare Konmari with Douglas' approach, one could say that, when not practicing Konmari or minimalism of some sort, the closer to 'purity' one could get would be through placing possessions in their pertaining category. Douglas would agree that order and purity do not exist in objects themselves but in the conceptualization of binary categories. Moreover, if we compare Douglas' way of thinking with that of Marie Kondo, it could be argued that the Konmari method is quite a static way of looking at one's possessions. The Japanese author highlights how managing and discarding things at home should be a one-time

practice which sets the mindset in the right direction for the rest of life. Whilst Douglas' idea of personal and relative boundaries when organizing and decluttering would allow a more dynamic process, adjusting one's binary categories according to necessities in each moment of life.

These paragraphs have exemplified how material objects determine experiences of being an individual and how their agency is not within but manifests differently in everyday practices. The following ones will better clarify ways in which things are foundational in establishing and maintaining bonds in the present and future.

The art of tidying is really the art of curating, as forensic culling ultimately produces aesthetic bliss: the de-cluttered space becomes a shrine to joy.
(Kondō & Hirano, 2014)

3.2.4 Handling Loss

A specific phase of life, the one closer to death, is the focus of Margareta Magnusson's decluttering approach. This method, though in a less explicit manner, presents connections to the Swedish culture. Admittedly, the rite of passage that is death affects relatives more than the person his/herself. For this reason, Magnusson stresses the importance of eliminating both physical and emotional burden for relatives. Similarly, the ancient Swedish practice of senicide named Ättestupa, could be considered a way of coming to term with the inevitable while simultaneously easing the burden for one's family (Karl Bloomberg, 2019). Though material proof is scarce, and academics consider Ättestupa to be a mythological custom, the act of voluntarily jumping off a cliff by elderly or ill people still represents a relevant piece of evidence for the Swedish rational take on death. Nowadays, Magnusson's suggestion is less extreme, however, it is equal in the objective.

Considering Miller's view on material culture, discarding one's possessions in preparation for death might be compared to the economy of relationships. The concept derives from the term 'structural amnesia' first theorized by anthropologists when studying the two types of ancestors present in pastoralists' genealogies (Miller & Parrott, 2009). Between 'revered ancestors', those that are deemed more important, and 'new ancestors', those who recently died, there are many people who, through structural amnesia, become forgotten to keep the genealogy

length consistent. Erasing an ancestor from one's memory, in this case, is similar to the practice of sorting out material possessions at home while döstdning. Magnusson invites her readers to tackle the process of downsizing, which entails acknowledging and sorting out material possessions, with the well-being of the future generation in mind. She warns about how daunting the task is, but promptly highlights the benefits of an easier grieving moment later for family and friends. Therefore, we could argue that the economy of relationships or of things in the case of Magnusson's audience, is as advantageous as structural amnesia for



Fig. 10 Family home armchair, Ludovica Piro (research participant), 2021

The difficulty in sorting out things also arises from the sorting out of social relations that build around those artefacts. If we consider that what gets developed through the sorting out of things is a project of self-construction, we can say that people are rarely alone in the construction of their self-narrative.
(Marcoux, 2001, 80)

pastoralists' genealogies. Another example sheds light on the way in which material things are vehicles of relationships and bonds. Indeed, *döstädning*, being a preparatory process towards the transitory moment of death, could be compared to the process of deciding what to do with personal things when moving houses.

In a material culture study aimed at understanding the 'constitution of memory through displacements', it was reported how preparing for a move gave informants not only the chance to review and reorder things but do it in parallel with relationships and memories related to those. "Moving becomes a means to reshuffle relationships and memories by bringing them back into consciousness, by making them explicit and for deciding which ones to reinforce, which ones to abandon or put on hold. It allows people to keep track of their relationships and memories, keep a map of these and transform this map. In other words, moving allows people to order their relations and memories." (Marcoux, 2001, p. 83)



Fig. 11 Family home sideboard, Ludovica Piro (research participant), 2021

In the same occasion, the process of sorting leads to a critical moment in which "what matters is not so much what is divided, but how it is divided; how the sorting is performed and conducted. The difficulty in sorting out things also arises from the sorting out of social relations that build around those artefacts. If we consider that what gets developed through the sorting out of things is a project of self-construction, we can say that people are rarely alone in the construction of their self-narrative." (Marcoux, 2001, p. 80) As an anticipated rite de passage related to death, *döstädning* is primarily viewed as an act of love towards future generations, but deciding what to keep and discard and what to give to whom determines relationship both with others and with the person that is cleaning out their space. Managing things equals to managing relationships, the ones with others and with oneself. According to Miller, who was looking to formulate a theory of shopping (Miller, 1998), relationships are always developed through a tension between idealized and actual categories. Throughout life periods, the balance shifts between identifying someone or oneself as a general category and as a particular person. He states how, often, people tend to keep things and memories that represent the moment in which the relationship was closest to its ideal (Miller & Parrott, 2009). In a transitional moment such as death, Miller highlights how, in England, descendants will inherit the same major financial assets, but they will be treated differently, as a par-

ticular person, when it comes to sentimental material items. Moreover, following the idea of the 'tailored gift' to relatives and friends, one gives away something special with the hope for them to become an idealized version of themselves: "Just as people who have been lost become transformed into generic and idealized ancestors by those left behind, so may the older generation seek to pass on objects that they hope will influence their descendants. By bequeathing these objects before they die, they hope to help their descendants become more like they would wish them to be." (Miller & Parrott, 2009, p. 515) When most of the items that want to be passed on are selected, Magnusson suggests to invite over extended family and friends to give them or let them take what they would like. She highlights how in this process the owner has the chance to convey the story of a particular thing and make it valuable for the person to have. Not with the aim of 'selling' it, but of remembering where it came from and wishing it leaves something to them of its owner.

Once again, Miller draws attention to the way in which objects are determinant in our everyday lives, and they hold power in mediating relationships even after their original owners are dead. "As in almost all our research on loss, little of this process of detachment is prescribed or even particularly noticed. It is something that people creatively develop as their own particular strategy of divestment and separation. The

By bequeathing these objects before they die, they hope to help their descendants become more like they would wish them to be.

(Miller & Parrott, 2009, 515)

same humility of material culture which makes it invisible to professionals makes it highly adaptable and personally appropriate for such purposes.”(Miller & Parrott, 2009, p. 509) Magnusson’s method for clean-out is the one that most resonates with Miller’s material culture approach. Indeed, it is here demonstrated, how things not only aid in maintaining relationships with current friends and family, but also in preparing and planning for the future that one wishes their children, grandchildren and friends to have.

3.2.5 Mobile Possessions

The topic introduced in the final part of the last paragraph, that is gifting and exchanging material things, has been widely explored in material culture studies. The main theories developed by some of the most important scholars and anthropologists who wrote about this particular practice will be reported in light of the reviewed Swedish Death Cleaning.

Exchanging things never happens without implications. Anthropologist Marcel Mauss highlights the importance of gifting in archaic societies and reveals what factors into giving gifts in contemporary times. Gifts originally consisted of rituals, banquets, dances, fairs and with them came the obligation to reciprocate, or war could be started. According to Mauss this constituted a system called ‘system of total services’. Gifting, both then and now, equals to forming a bond that is kept alive through reciprocation. This ensures that societies keep functioning in the best way possible, for this reason Mauss described gifts are the glue of society. (Mauss & Halls, 1990)

Arjun Appadurai, drawing from the work of Mauss and others, adds on a further layer by conceptualizing the idea that “persons and things are not radically distinct categories, and that the transactions that surround things are invested with the properties of social relations.” (Appadurai, 2006, p. 15) Indeed, when something is exchanged part of the donor is also given with it. In this way a relationship is formed, it might be a in a

positive or negative manner, but there is a tie where nothing was before. In between gifts, a status of debt is perceived by those who need to reciprocate it. If we retrieve Magnusson’s döstdäning, it could be argued that the children and grandchildren, as receivers of selected belongings, are in debt. As said earlier, the person performing death cleaning on their own things decides what to leave and to whom implicitly or explicitly wishing that those objects will enable them to become more like they would want them to. In this case debt could be extinguished by consciously or unconsciously doing what they think their parents and grandparents want them to do. For what regards the object itself, Appadurai proposed how in “consumer society” such as the United States and most Western countries, there are several dimensions of abstraction surrounding

Persons and things are not radically distinct categories, the transactions that surround things are invested with the properties of social relations.
(Appadurai, 2006, 15)

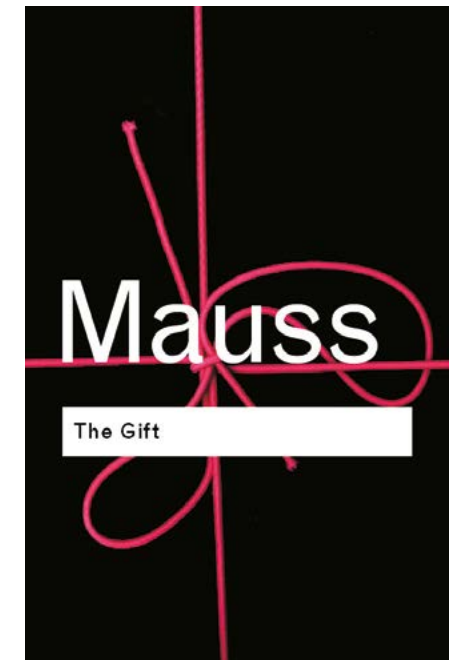


Fig. 12 “The Gift” book cover, 2001

material things. One of them is “the deep tension between the singularity and the commodity.” (Appadurai, 1986) Indeed, in a specific moment in time, any material thing either belongs to the gift and commodity category. A commodity is a standardized, marketable object with a price, that is available to anyone willing to pay for it. He describes the ‘commodity situation’ “in the social life of any ‘thing’ [...] as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, future) for some other thing is its socially relevant factor.” (Appadurai, 1986, p. 13) Whilst a gift is highly personal, deemed special and sometimes magical. It is important to consider

the moment in which that particular thing is marked as pertaining to one category or the other. In fact, the social and cultural context make it so that things move into and out their commodity status. That happens when an exchange takes place. Indeed, in one moment a thing could be marked as a commodity, but when it is bought to be gifted it gains a factor of singularity because it was something that was specifically given from someone to someone. However, Appadurai notes how the status of things is so fluid and interchangeable that, in Western societies, it stands the problem of how to maintain relationships when everything is marketable. As Mauss theorized, a gift always has some of the donor in itself. It is the uniqueness of an object that makes it a gift, ensuring that the aforementioned relationships and societies maintain their bonds. Therefore, the singularity of the object is represented, not by their availability or unavailability on the market, but by its donor and his personal intentions.

Miller underlines how the conceptualization around exchanges does not start from asking what societies do with things, but how the circulation of things constitutes societies. (Miller, 2010) In contemporary times, the growing awareness regarding material things and their mobility can be appreciated from popular practices that usually follow clean-out activities. Mobile apps like Depop and Poshmark represent popular ways of finding somebody to exchange things with from the comfort of home. But their functionality

depends on monetary transactions. The “Buy Nothing Project” encourages members of their local “Buy Nothing” Facebook group to share anything that they want to eliminate or swap with a short description and picture for someone else to pick up for free. The co-founders stated how: “the project is about setting the scarcity model of our cash economy aside in favor of creatively and collaboratively sharing the abundance around us.” (Rebecca Rockefeller, n.d.) A reflection on the category of these objects could be made. More often than not, the objects listed on “Buy Nothing” pages might belong to the commodity category. According to Appadurai, it is something that when exchanged is socially relevant and can be available to buy brand new on the market. But when acquired through such a process, when participants put effort in finding and contributing to avoid the disposal of perfectly functioning things, taking the time to list them online, they be considered as singular and special as gifts. They come from a specific person that has a specific intention, that of favoring the second-handedness of things, and can maybe even share the story of that particular object. Proposing to give away or to swap things coincides to the aforementioned practices of gifting or exchanging. According to the project’s rules it is not obligatory to reciprocate, but an implicit debt might be there, that of responsibility towards the future. If one participates as a receiver, they might not have anything on hand to give away, but they are expected to behave and

favor the second-hand economy whenever they can. What were once things belonging to a single household, maybe forgotten and stuck at the bottom of a closet or garage, can now be in the hands of someone else on the other side of the world or even down the street with a click. The singularity of these objects might not always be portrayed or communicated. Or it might be, but not fully appreciated by the receiver. However, it must be recognized how these processes have made material things more exchangeable and fluid than ever, and as said before, with them the same has happened to relationships.

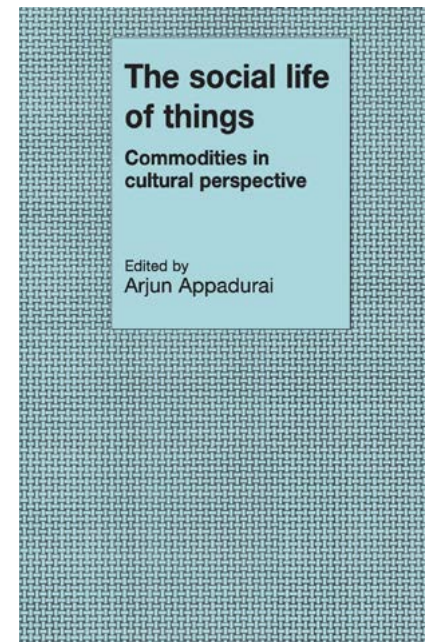


Fig. 13 “The Social Life of Things” book cover, 1988

Perceiving a bond in previously owned material things might provoke different reactions in people, especially if they are involuntarily inherited. Indeed, when reasoning about the process of moving into a previously inhabited house, it was found how, the home-making process resulted more challenging. Traces of past lives in living spaces, but also behind walls and carpets, act as means for bonding or at least feeling related to other people, even without ever meeting them (Lipman, 2019). In some cases, when an object is granted authority of some sort, the newcomer feels the need to safeguard and act as a custodian. The idea of some things or features that overlive the house’s inhabitants, indeed, leads to feeling a sense of connection to a “wider social lineage” (Lipman, 2019, p.88) Other inhabitants tend to store found items to keep them intact and at the same time contain their presence. “Such decisions need to negotiate the desire for personal space alongside the duty to make the ‘right’ decision for the home itself, be that to discard, retain or rebury objects.” (Lipman, 2019, p. 95) What these practices have in common is that they are always shared processes, and they are about negotiating past, presents and futures. Material objects enable an “exchange of conversation over time, part of a chain link of embodied relatedness” (Lipman, 2019, p. 95) Once again, the ability of material things to convey, establish and strengthen bonds among people is confirmed.

3.3 Key Findings

This chapter opened with a speculation on the ways in which people retrieved a sense of control over their lives during a period characterized by uncertainty in all areas of life, provoked by the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

Douglas' theory of order and binary categories was presented and used to propose that it was through their living spaces and material possessions that individuals and families succeeded in gaining a feeling of agency and control over their lives. Re-configuration, organization and disposal practices were considered and explored. In particular, the negative connotation around materiality and consumption was highlighted.

Four currently popular self-help methods for managing and tackling things at home were selected to understand current practices at the global level. Each of those was described and subsequently critiqued through the material culture lens and its foundational concepts. After a thorough consideration of the elements emerged from the analysis, the the most relevant findings are highlighted.

Douglas, Miller, Mauss, Appadurai and other anthropologists successfully demonstrated the centrality of ordinary stuff in shaping our existence. The importance of the material dimension is once again highlighted by Miller who states that: "the more we think of things as alien, the more we keep ourselves sacrosanct and pure" (Miller, 2010)

For this reason, the scope of the next phase lays in understanding how material stuff enabled relationships, more specifically which practices revolving around personal belongings were enacted during the Pandemic period and which implications they had on the life of people. Exploratory User Research will be conducted with the aim to explore organization and de-cluttering activities and validate the aforementioned findings in the Pandemic Italian context.

Condemning forms of appreciation towards material things led people to feel insecure about their relationship with those, leaving them seeking **guidance**.

Contrary to what is thought, material things **do not constrain** or hold back from a satisfactory life, they **enable** sharing and bonding processes.

The agency of material things is not embedded in things themselves, rather it shows when they act as **raw material for self-determination** and **relationships formation**.

Managing possessions equals to **managing relationships**, and the practice comes with a chance of influencing other people's present and future lives;

Gifting material things provides the opportunity to generate **new relationships** and build a **foundation for future exchanges**.

Primary Exploratory Research

Extrapolating relevant findings from the Literature Review in chapter three allowed to build a critical foundation to further investigate current practices of retrieving control through material objects. The following chapter presents the approach, aim, and research methods employed to directly investigate the practices and attitudes of people involved in organizing and clean-out projects during the initial Pandemic period.

The first exploratory research session was conducted to specifically study people's experiences in respect to their material possessions; for this reason, it was named 'The Tangible.' A second session focused on people's relationships in the household, and the role played by their belongings to mediate those, hence the title 'The Intangible.' For each of the two sessions, a preliminary analysis and synthesis follows, correlated with a description of the methods used to systematize and make sense of the collected information.

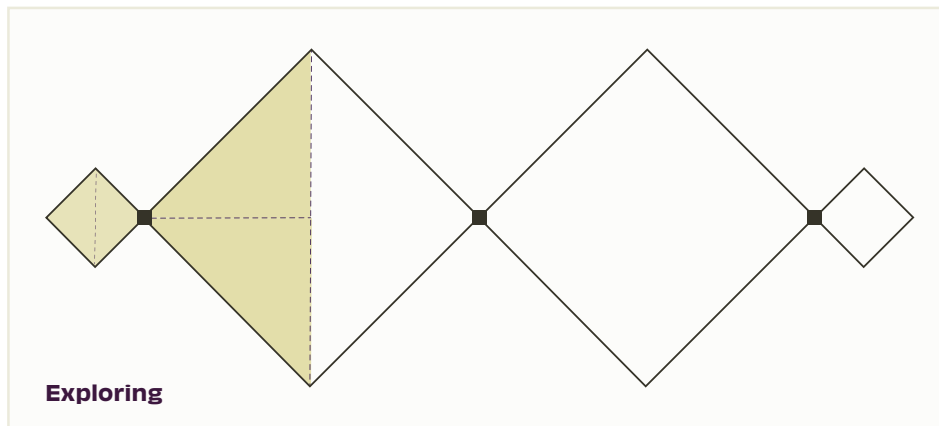


4.1 Research Methodology

4.1.1 Investigating Practices

As exemplified by the discussion in Chapter 2, a high degree of uncertainty in all areas of life was imposed by the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The ways people are coping with the situation are multiple. Similarly, in Chapter 3, reviewing and critically assessing organizational and de-cluttering methods through bibliographic sources, demonstrated that managing belongings in the domestic space is a highly personal process driven by daily habits, beliefs, values, and different views of the world. It has been discussed how focusing research activities on the needs of people and potential users is limiting. (Broadbent, 2018) People are, by nature, resilient and always finding new ways to be in control of highly problematic situations, consequently creating strategies to live in the best possible conditions.

“[T]his implies that the expression of needs rarely touches the core of experiences because needs have been addressed in the elaboration of the existing practices.” (Broadbent, 2018, p. 27) Therefore, designers should concentrate on the investigation of human practices, defined as “bodily and mental routines” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 257) and in continuous development according to a series of factors from social, economic, physical spheres. In the case of this thesis, the management of material things is investigated as a field of action where multiple practices develop, and if the ever-changing environment in which people act determines how these are carried out, it follows that the research approach, methodology and methods will respond to the highly contextual and dynamic features of such environment. Moreover, this thesis’ user research resonates with Miller’s approach as an anthropologist, which is heavily reliant on field studies. He underlines how only by spotting the particular one can understand the universal and vice versa. Finding extremes is what allows one to keep touch with reality and present relevant anthropological work. (Miller, 2010) These considerations motivate the choice of a specific approach, whose explanation follows.



Aim The ultimate aim of this research phase is to build a body of knowledge on the practices revolving around material things in the domestic space during the Pandemic lockdowns. The collected information will serve as a repository throughout the rest of the thesis work, continuously being updated and enriched throughout the process. Coherently with Miller's considerations, preserving the peculiarity and identity of each participant told experiences and stories is considered central in the development of all research activities.

Approach It can be stated that what follows is an 'exploratory research' with the scope of understanding and uncovering the complexity behind people's practices when managing material objects. As it will be further explained, research methods were not chosen to investigate a particular aspect, nor to provide a final answer to any question, rather, to explore people's daily lives, collecting information for a basic understanding and converging to elaborate future developments. Secondly, for the abovementioned reasons, the research follows the interpretivist philosophy of research, and more specifically the constructivist research paradigm was adopted. This approach is characterized by focusing on lived experiences with participants that contribute to the construction of knowledge around the investigated 'reality'. (Robson & McCartan, 2016) Findings are multiple and may be in contrast among themselves, but still be true. Constructivists also highlight how gathered knowledge is contextual and could change over time. Furthermore, it is understood and accepted that findings are subjective, as the researcher participates in building interpretations, taking into account various factors from his/her view of the world to contemporary socio-cultural dynamics "[T]here is an inevitable historical and sociocultural dimension to this construction. We do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197)

Coherently, primary research has been used as the only source for conducting the 'exploration' at this stage and advancing with the process, as it entails the collection of direct evidence from people, situations and places. In the case of this thesis, directly talking to

The expression of needs rarely touches the core of experiences because needs have been addressed in the elaboration of the existing practices.
(Broadbent, 2018, 27)

people who personally and recently went through organization, re-configuration and de-cluttering processes, and being able to draw from their experiences allowed to keep the singularity of individuals' voices and their practices at the center of the research. Bringing out and enhancing peculiarities to be compared, ultimately enriching the aforementioned body of knowledge.

More specifically, collecting firsthand experiences has been possible by drawing and adapting tools from ethnography. It has been discussed how 'rapid design-oriented ethnography' contributes to the 'discovery phase' in the first diamond of the Double Diamond process formulated by the British Design Council in 2014, allowing to uncover insights by establishing a two way dialogue of collaboration through empathy (Broadbent, 2018). Investigating the complexity of human behavior through research is indeed the focus of ethnography, which has been described as "iterative-inductive research (that evolves in design through the study), drawing on a family of methods ... that acknowledges the role of theory as well as the researcher's own role and that views humans as part object/part subject." (O'Reilly, 2005) Applying ethnographic methods means practicing mainly qualitative research, allowing for flexibility, and leaving space to adapt and respond to possible shifts in the investigated context. (Hox & Boeije, 2005)

With the research topic revolving around material possessions, carrying out a field investigation would have provided the chance to physically participate and engage with people's belongings and their

organizational and de-cluttering processes. In the current health emergency, this resulted impossible; nevertheless, digital technologies have allowed to paint a rich picture around every single participant, highlighting the complexity of their practices and peculiarities and relating them to the global phenomena of managing material objects to retrieve a sense of control.

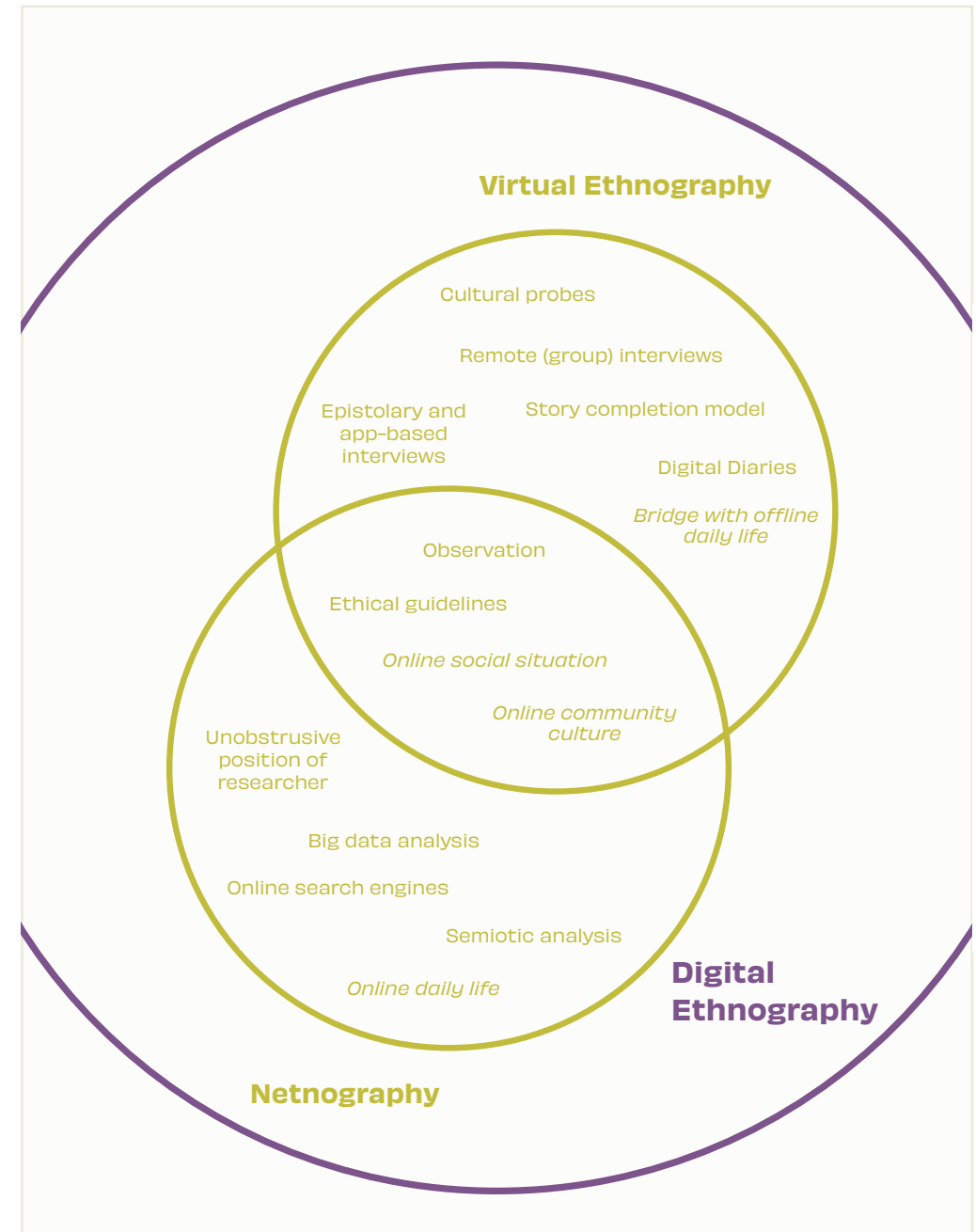
As previously mentioned, common to all chosen research activities is the fact that they have been mainly conducted through the use of digital devices. The rise of digital ethnography or cyber ethnography in the field of social studies corresponds to the spread of internet access in the wider world.

4.1.2 Virtually Conducting Research

According to International UX consultancy, Experientia, who developed a framework with methods and tools for conducting digital ethnography, this includes both netnography, the study of online social behavior, and virtual ethnography, planned interaction with individuals and groups of people through digital devices. (Experientia, 2020) Scholars have thoroughly discussed the implications of getting to know potential users through digital technologies. Some have argued how such tools' employment provides mediated information, which is deemed not as authentic as when collecting the same through face-to-face interactions.

Miller pointed out the tendency to believe that the 'virtual' stands as the opposite of the 'real' but dismissed this belief by underlining how in-person interactions are just as mediated as digital ones. We fail to notice the frame around those simply because they result effortless, while a webcam might be more evident, thus eliciting self-consciousness. (Horst & Miller, 2012) "[...] Online worlds are simply another arena, alongside offline worlds, for expressive practice, and there is no reason to privilege one against the other. Every time we use the word "real" analytically, as opposed to colloquially, we undermine the project of digital anthropology, fetishizing pre-digital culture as a site of retained authenticity." (Horst & Miller, 2012, p. 13)

As digital technologies enable the access to different, non-physical field sites, that are equally action-filled and, contrary to what is believed, enriching, ethnographers have been suggesting shifting to a multi-dimensional approach that takes into account how people's experiences flow from places to devices, and to temporalities. In this perspective, only considering physical spaces for field studies results limiting. (Haines, 2017) "We are equally human in each of the different and diverse arenas of framed behaviour within which we live. Each may however bring out different aspects of our humanity, and thereby finesse our appreciation of what being human is. Digital anthropology and its core concerns thereby enhance conventional anthropology." (Horst & Miller, 2012, p. 15)



Tab. 4 Digital Ethnography, Experientia, 2020

4.1.3 Debriefing Activities

After each session of interacting with participants, a few hours were dedicated to reflecting on what worked and what could be improved in future research activities. The assessment of interactions' quality can be carried out in various ways, and with a small group of researchers, one-on-one, or alone. The four main points for debriefing

We are equally human in each of the different and diverse arenas of framed behaviour within which we live.

Each may however bring out different aspects of our humanity, and thereby finesse our appreciation of what being human is.

(Horst & Miller, 2012, 15)

a research session are, preparation, debriefing the content, debriefing the context, and finally quantifying. (Schoepfle & Werner, 1999) It should be agreed that the process needs to report an accurate description of the session, and it should be conducted with a strategy, so not to distort or overlook pieces of information.

In the case of this research, debriefing was conducted by the author alone, and then with support from the thesis supervisor.

In all sessions the context was particularly important, as the engagement and involvement of participants were crucial. Providing a safe virtual environment to open up and reflect on one's own practices and the reason for them allowed to have deeper and clearer insights. The choice of always interviewing people individually, avoiding focus groups, was made towards this objective. Being over empathic towards the participant helped in evaluating the degree of comfort and openness throughout each session. This allowed for adjustments to facilitate a more successful result the following time. Often it was a matter of adapting a few words, according to the interviewee's age or background. A few of the activities carried out while debriefing were reflecting upon the spontaneity and richness of answers, assessing the self-communicating and narrative nature of answers, and finally reviewing the author's own effort and approach to verify assumptions from the participants.

4.2 Investigating the Tangible

4.2.1 Objectives

As the research aim was to explore people's established and emerging practices around the organization and clean-out of material things during the Pandemic period, open objectives were conceived. In particular, the research focused on:

- The sorting out and assessment of material things;
- The disposal of unwanted material things;
- Close and extended family involvement;

4.2.2 Participants Recruitment & Characteristics

For what concerns the recruitment of participants, they were all selected from the author's extended network; indeed, they belonged to the circle of family members and friends or acquaintances. This selection method has been defined as 'convenience sampling'. Being familiar with each participant was advantageous as having known them for years granted access to their backgrounds without explicitly asking for those. Therefore, such a sampling technique certainly allowed connection and relatively easier communication, facilitating the sharing of stories regarding particular objects and opening up about past events and memories. For this session, five people with different socio-demographic characteristics were involved. They were all Italian, with ages ranging from 25 to 76 years old. Their living situation in terms of household members and occupation was varied, which provided significant points for comparison and reflection. The main criterion for selection was whether participants had recently tackled or were in the process of organizing or de-cluttering their belongings at home. The activities could either have happened at the participant's house, a relative's, or both. What was crucial is that they had personally experienced the management of personal belongings, preferably during the Pandemic period.

The Tangible Research Session **Participants**

Name	Age	Occupation	Living Situation
Moreno	25	Game designer	With parents and older brother
Serena	76	Retiree (prev. seamstress)	With retired husband
Monica	59	Retiree (prev. biologist)	With retired husband and 25 y.o. son
Gianluca	25	Design student	With parents and younger brother
Nicoletta	56	Nurse	With 2 daughters in their 20s

4.2.3 Employed Methods

Virtual Semi-structured Interviews

Virtual semi-structured interviews have been chosen as the primary research method to get to know participant's thoughts informally and deeply. In semi-structured interviews the inquirer uses a discussion guide and carries on the conversation with non-leading questions, suggesting further areas to probe and explore rather than looking for an answer to a specific question. This type of interview has been defined as "conversation with a purpose" (Burgess, 1984) 102 and as "conversation as research." (Kvale, 1996, p. 5) Considering the Latin meaning of the term 'conversation,' 'wandering together with,' Steinar Kvale (1996) proposed to exemplify the interviewer's figure through the metaphor of the traveler. Interacting with people for knowledge formation leads the traveler to simultaneously collect and compare learnings with their previous values that might have been taken for granted until then. Such experience's transformative character demonstrates how conversations with different people provide notions on which the interviewer builds on to uncover insights.

Implementation

An interview guide was prepared for each session to travel through people's living spaces and belongings virtually. It was created by identifying macro-areas that needed to be investigated with each participant. Each section was ideated from the above-mentioned objectives to ensure consistency between goals and activities. The guide was built to funnel the discourse, starting by asking about general activities conducted around the house during National Covid-19 Lockdowns, then diving deep into the topic of personal belongings and their management. A brief introduction on the thesis topic was provided at the beginning of each session. However, details and assumptions on particular aspects were left to discuss at the end of each interview to avoid bias. According to the interviewees and the author's thought flows, emerging topics that weren't included in the initial plan were explored. At the start of each conversation, participants were made aware of the interview style and were invited to articulate their responses thoroughly. Most interviewees were involved through video calls, and they were asked for consent to be recorded for transcriptions and reviews afterward. Each interview lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. Whilst interacting, note-taking was carried out to pin down key points and concepts that could have been explored in follow up activities.

Discussion Guide

Time at home during Covid-19 National Lockdowns

- Taking up new or postponed activities
- Ways of living the home space

Organization and de-cluttering projects at own house

- What sparked the idea
- Criteria for keeping and discarding
- Time period
- Storing
- Donating
- Final Result
- Changes to implement in future organization and de-cluttering cycles
- Evaluation of own feelings

Organization and de-cluttering projects at relatives'/friends' houses

- Reason
- Experience



Fig. 15-14 Research Participants

"Some things from my sister in law were repurposed in our home, we put the Murano chandelier and couch in the computer room. Some other things we kept for my daughter, who now lives abroad, to have in their apartment for when she will be back." - Serena

"When my grandma passed away I didn't participate in cleaning out the main rooms of her apartment, but now, after a few years and knowing that things are still there in some rooms I would like to go and see what's there, I'm curious." - Gianluca

"I wanted to prepare the bookcase for a new TV that was bigger and nicer. While I was in the process I also wanted to put an old computer there, to use as a secondary one, so I had my working area in the living room as well. I took advantage of the moment to create a set up to play videogames with my brother, we had been talking about it for years." - Moreno

"I would define myself as a conservationist, it's really hard for me to throw things out. Rather, I organize things to maintain order in the house but I try to keep them. Newspapers and newspapers cuttings, school books, I re-organize those when I have the time, I rarely discard anything." - Monica

"I think I will be satisfied when I won't be dependent on anything material and digital anymore, because I don't want to cheat myself. It's hypocrite to say I would be independent when everything that I need is saved in the cloud. I will get to the point when, if everything I have on the cloud goes missing, I won't care so much..." - Moreno

"I always sort things out by myself, because I want to do everything I want on my own. I think other people distract me and make my mind wonder and go back to a few years and I lose time." - Nicoletta

Photo elicitation

Photo elicitation was here used as a follow-up research activity that allowed to further investigate people's practices in relation to specific objects. This exercise belongs to visual ethnography and consists in asking participants to take digital pictures, in this case functioning as material for individual discussion later. As mentioned earlier, some might argue that self-taken pictures by participants are a 'mediated result' because they chose what to let the researcher see through their virtual eye and consequently, it was not possible to spontaneously assess people in their natural living environment. However, when discussing the materiality of digitally produced content in digital anthropology, it has been stated how: "Materiality applies just as much to persons as to that which they create." (Horst & Miller, 2012, p.26) Digital representations of their organizational and de-cluttering projects provided the opportunity to further understand and take notes about their attitude and approaches in respect to material belongings.

Implementation

Participants were asked to produce images of their belongings and living spaces when in the process of sorting things out and deciding what to do with those. In this case pictures were all taken in an offline context, the home, an intimate setting that might have been difficult to access otherwise. Indeed, as it was impossible to observe participants managing their belongings directly, photos were the means that facilitated overcoming the privacy barrier, allowing to have a look into people's experiences with their belongings during the Pandemic lockdown periods. Moreover, asking participants to take pictures in a certain time frame, but not restricting their actions to a few hours might have positively impacted their experience and their engagement with such activity. No specific instructions were given as to what to photograph, it was simply asked to represent and portray the decluttering process through pictures, as the whole primary research process was exploratory in nature. Finally, they uploaded their collection of photos in a previously set up shared folder on Google Drive.



Fig.16-26
Informants' pictures of
personal objects

Autoconfrontation

The availability of digital pictures regarding participants' organization and de-cluttering activities allowed for an exercise to understand their practices further. First theorized by French cognitive science scholar Jacques Theureau, in 1987, "individual auto-confrontation is a means to reveal cognitive processes underlying the description of a work activity." (Mollo & Falzon, 2004) 8 This individual reflection aims to bring to light the practices followed by participants by asking them to verbally describe their processes, which leads to identifying activities that are not conscious per se but can become so by externalizing knowledge. (Mollo & Falzon, 2004) This research method is similar to 'photo elicitation', in that it is not used for merely providing more information about a topic, but rather a different kind of information through the verbalization of actions and thoughts by the means of visual inputs. (Harper, 2002)

Implementation

The exercise was conducted individually with participants, via video call, by screen-sharing their previously uploaded photos. A dedicated discussion guide was prepared, but once again, the aim was that of uncovering stories through informal conversations that would let participants take the lead and spontaneously express. Each session lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and it was recorded with participants' permit to allow transcriptions and reviews afterward.

"It's a souvenir originally. But my mum used it to call us when lunch and dinner were ready, so we keep it, it was really exciting hearing it ring." - Moreno



"It is stupid but it's something I'll never get rid of. We used to bring it to every vacation, me and my brother, taking turns for remembering and being taking care of it. I do not know how it started, it was like an unspoken pact. I've been keeping it for many years now, despite avoiding keeping anything useless. I cannot break the pact" - Moreno

Fig.27-28
Informants' pictures of
personal objects

4.2.4 Preliminary Analysis & Synthesis

To start the preliminary analysis process, recordings of each session were digitally transcribed and translated from Italian to English. This usually took two hours for one-hour long interviews; therefore, it was time-consuming, but it guaranteed that any communicated detail was considered and not skipped over. In fact, gathered information resulted particularly dense and rich. Transcriptions represented a starting point, which allowed for critically reviewing information and elaborating it into knowledge through multiple visualization and analysis methods for progressing with the research.

Journey Mapping

The first tool used to analyze information was journey mapping, as reviewing responses immediately generated the need to logically and chronologically organize the type of activities conducted by participants when tackling their belongings. Indeed, “[a] journey map is a visualization of the process that a person goes through in order to accomplish a goal.” (Nielsen Norman Group, 2018) The focus is on human experiences, telling the story of one or a group of people. Journey maps often do not only include actions, but also ways to track people’s feelings and emotions in order to create a narrative. The visualization can be as an ‘as-is map’ or a ‘to-be map’ depending if it is used to showcase current or future experiences. The scale can vary, according to the level of details. Ultimately, designers identify opportunities to work on in the future. (Stickdorn et al., 2018)

Implementation

In the case of this analysis, the journey map was research-based and compiled by using semi-structured interviews information. Elaborating information started by noting down all the mentioned tasks from participants’ experiences, transcribing them onto post-its and organizing them in a chronological manner. On the left side, participants were listed. This exercise led to understand how organizing and decluttering processes entail multiple subtasks and actions that were not considered before. Some are performed before, such as preparing the space beforehand and some after, such as deep cleaning and dusting to put things back in their spot. Moreover, those who additionally experienced sorting out and organizing dead relatives’ belongings recently were marked in pink.

The following step included clustering and or conceptualizing tasks into activities, naming them, and positioning them in sequence in an Excel sheet. The multitude of activities, such as assessing and temporarily moving possessions, sorting out, organizing, repurposing, cleaning, donating and discarding, were considered and reflected upon. It was initially assumed that participants were aiming to organize and free up space in their rooms at home. However, organizing activities in the journey map uncovered how, for some, the ultimate goal for embarking on such projects, was donating and for others repurposing things. It was clear how their experiences were multi-faceted, and one

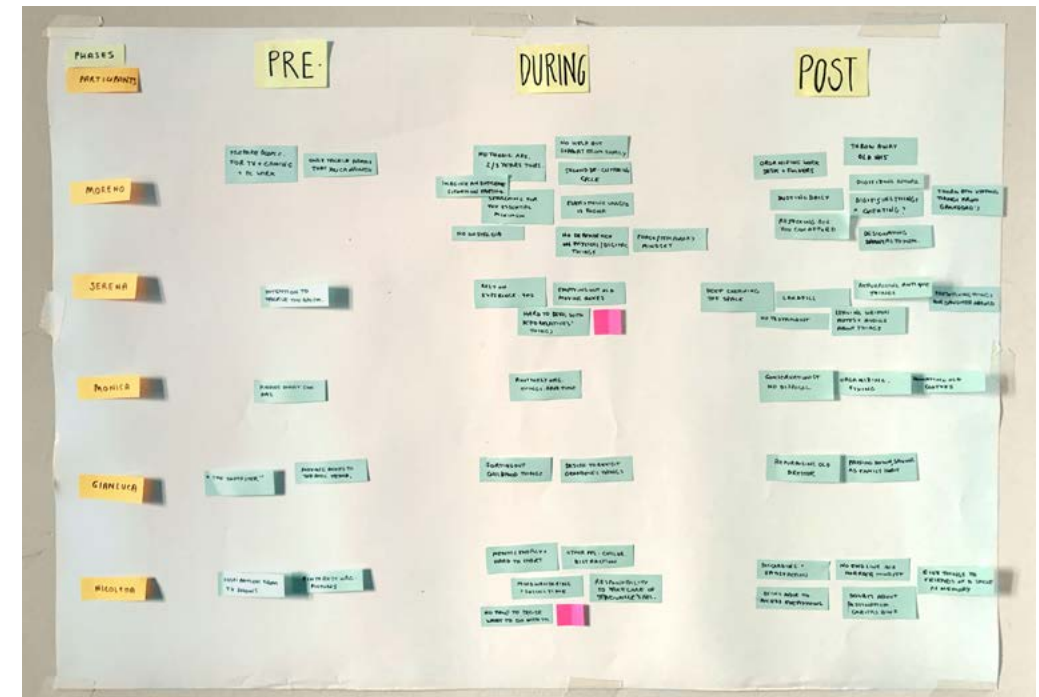


Fig. 29 Post-its Journey Map

Notes

Reconstructing the processes reported by individual participants by chronologically organizing post-its, allowed to understand how complex and articulated it is.

A deeper reflection on participants’ ultimate goals was generated by comparing their journeys.

Phase	PRE		DURING		POST						
Task	Assessing Possessions	Temporarily Moving Possessions	Decluttering (1st cycle)	Decluttering (2nd cycle)	Re-organizing	Repurposing	Cleaning/Dusting	Donating	Throwing away	Selling	Gifting
Moreno	X		A	A	A		A		A	A	A
Serena	X		A	B	AB	AB	AB	A	A		
Monica	X		A		A		A	A			
Gianluca	X	A					A	A			
Nicoletta	X	A	B		AB		B	AB	A	B	B
Definition	Evaluating the quantity and type of one's personal and/or relative's possessions to have an overview of the work that needs to be done.	Temporarily moving and storing one's personal and/or relative's possessions in a less lived part of the house to undertake the clean-out process in the future.	The method employed to decide what to keep and discard out of one's personal and/or relative's possessions.		Keeping things as memory and/or changing their organization for future use.	Using already owned or recently acquired objects/furniture after decluttering in own house or relative's for a new purpose.	Taking advantage of the situation to thoroughly clean and dust objects, furniture, surfaces.	Giving things away to dedicated associations/non-profits.	Discarding objects/furniture as general waste at home or bringing it to the landfill.	Giving things away for a profit.	Giving things away to friends and family.

Legend
 A = managing possessions at own house
 B = managing possessions at recently passed relative's house

Tab.5 Journey Map of informants' experiences

journey could not fit all. Actions were ordered horizontally and marked with an 'X' for each participant that performed them at least once to have an exhaustive overview of who did what starting from March 2020. Moreover, in the 'during' phase of the journey, the letters 'A' and 'B' have been used respectively to indicate that decluttering happened at the participant's house, or at a recently passed relative's house. The variety in goals and approaches is what probably affected the duration of the process for individual participants, who declared having carried out tasks over various amounts of time, two weeks, three months, some even one year. For this reason,

no specific time-period was applied to the visualization. Finally, the process of building the journey map was iterative, meaning that the map was refined by reviewing transcripts of interviews multiple times and working on the naming of activities. It became evident how, the 'pre' and 'post' phase of such processes are equally important as the core one. The final map allowed for comparing the experience of participants among each other and certainly served as a tool to develop a deeper understanding of decluttering and organization practices by conceptually portraying the complexity of performed tasks.

Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis allowed to dive deeper into each participants' practices and anecdotes while managing their belongings, and highlighting the topics emerged from discussions. This tool has been described as: "a systematic method of breaking down and organizing rich data from qualitative research by tagging individual observations and quotations with appropriate codes, to facilitate the discovery of significant themes." (Nielsen Norman Group, 2021)

It has been argued how, thematic analysis's nature is bottom up, enabling researchers to be driven by the content of the data, limiting bias and assumptions. In fact, if journey mapping requires elaborating thoughts from participants and naming them to fit into actions and phases, in this sense it is more top down, thematic analysis encourages a closer match between input information and analysis outcome. (Braun & Clarke, 2012) Indeed, the main activity when doing thematic analysis is linking evidence from research activities to broader themes which have been explained as "a description of a belief, practice, need, or another phenomenon that is discovered from the data" (Nielsen Norman Group, 2021)

Implementation

The method was implemented by first, reading through digital transcripts from interviews and identifying segments of text that might have been relevant for progressing

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	
15	Clean-out Phases											
16		Moreno	While I was in the process I also wanted to put an old computer there, to use as a secondary one, so I had my working area in the living room as well. The purpose was also setting up the bookcase to play videogames with my brother. The whole point was to clean up as much as possible, I wanted to take out everything that we don't need.				Taking advantage of the cleanout moment to set up and repurpose the living room bookcase with a new TV and computer for work.	Rearranging things/furniture in the house	Working from home			
17		Moreno	use it again in the near future. I think much more when it comes to memories because I know they are not replaceable, I cannot buy the same thing again. What I want to dispose is divided into different trash bags for recycling (undifferentiated, paper, plastic). Yesterday I was thinking about my drawings, I have been drawing for many years, what should I do with them, toss them or don't? I'm struggling to decide. It's not something I can buy again or simply reproduce digitally, that ink is really there, that graphite is really there...				He methodically sorts out things, putting a strict threshold for what to keep and discard.	Memories				
18		Moreno	also in handwritten cards, there are a lot of characteristics that a digital photo will never be able to convey, the handwriting, the space.				He is in doubt about what to do with the drawings he made through the years. recognizes characteristics that cannot be reproduced.	Memories	Storing	Dissatisfaction		
19		Moreno	When I started freelancing I learned that I needed to keep everything tidy, I started with my computer, since it's where my work happens, having an organized desktop and folders, then with paperwork, having to keep up with documents and filing them was challenging at first, but I found my system and I think it's part of what made me decide to only keep useful things/things I use on a daily basis.				By learning to eliminate and keep digital documents in order for work, he realized he wanted to do the same in his room and house at large.	Working from home	Mindset evaluation	Habits	Digital Decluttering	
20		Moreno	I must say that living here in my parent's home that is quite spacious nothing has ever forced				He decides to cleanout areas that he knows will be manageable within the end of the day.	Space	Aspiration			
21		Moreno	My clean-outs never last for more than 1 day, I never tackle something that I know I cannot finish before the end of the day because I don't want to create a mess and leave the task unfinished for several days/weeks.				They have been moving and repurposing small furniture, but didn't declutter.	Timing	Space			
22		Gianluca	We moved things, but didn't really discard a lot, we did re-purpose some small furniture, such as a low dresser that I use as a TV stand now in my space, and another one that I put next to the desk to store some things.				They moved games/things from a few years back to allow the renewal of the brother's bedroom.	Repurposing things/furniture				
23		Gianluca	We just went through those things in my brother's bedroom that had been sitting there without us using them for a long time. Our goal was just moving things to allow the carpenters to build new furniture, since he is fully studying from home.				His bedroom has been used as a storage space because it's large and a less lived part of the house	Rearranging things/furniture in the house	Work from home			
24		Gianluca	Everything that was in my brother's bedroom from when we were little was moved to the attic = my bedroom because it's more spacious, and it's been sitting here for a few months, actually it's always been "the dumpster".				one day dreams about a tidy house by watching TV, going through Pinterest,	Temporarily moving things to another room	Space			
25		Nicoletta	I get inspired by seeing someone else's house and by TV shows, I imagine how my house				It's really hard to get started, but then she feels relieved.	Aspiration	Passively searching			
26		Nicoletta	I go through Pinterest and I see many pictures about how to tidy up a laundry room for				She prefers sorting things out alone, to avoid losing too much time going through memories.	Aspiration	Actively searching			
27		Nicoletta	to keep and discard, it's much easier to keep everything, but once I start and I see progress I keep going and I am relieved.				She routinely cleans out rooms when it's needed and she has the time.	Mindset evaluation				
28		Nicoletta	I always sort things out by myself, because I want to do everything I want on my own. I think other people distract me and make my mind wonder and go back to a few years and I lose time.				He digitalized memories, but everything else such as old VHS was discarded as fogna.	Memories				
29		Monica	I don't really have a criterion to do it, I think my thought process is that when I realize I have 1 hour of free time and I feel like cleaning out things, I want to use it in the best way.				He strives to live with less things as	Timing	Routine clean outs			
30		Moreno	digitalized recordings or when me and my brother were kids, as memories. but the rest, such as old VHS, recorders, old Play-station manuals I chose to throw away. I asked myself when was the last time I used something, my Pinocchio VHS was probably last watched 15 years ago. That bookcase is now empty, nothing was saved. Leave everything as "fogna" not accumulating more things that I know I don't need, it's like searching for the essential					Memories	Old = dirt?			
		Moreno						Aspiration	Mindset evaluation			

Fig. 30 Thematic Analysis Excel sheet, in progress

with the analysis. Quotes including relevant concepts were pasted on an Excel sheet and marked with the corresponding interviewee's name. Each quote was paraphrased to have a descriptive note for easier reviews afterward.

As more quotes and respective notes were collected, a label or tag was assigned to each of them according to their content. Labels

were created as descriptive markers first to have a general idea of mentioned concepts, in the meantime, as similarities and differences were highlighted, iterations on said tags were performed, leading to assigning more interpretative markers. This activity was done by keeping in mind research objectives, however, by progressing with the analysis, more specific areas of investigation

emerged and developed. Indeed, it has been argued how: "[thematic] analysis produces the answer to a question, even if, as in some qualitative research, the specific question that is being answered only becomes apparent through the analysis." (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

Affinity Diagram

Used as a subsequent activity to thematic analysis, affinity diagramming allowed to critically compare descriptive and interpretative tags to finally cluster information into themes. First theorized by ethnologist, Jiro Kawakita, in the 1960s, the 'KJ Method' was originally used and appreciated in Japanese business and administrative circles, then taught in major economics universities in Japan. The method originated from attempting to integrate heterogeneous, qualitative data collected with ethnographic research methods in a mountain village. By viewing huge amounts of data on his desk, Kawakita realized the potential of spatially arranging conceptual cards to systematize information. Refining the method took fifteen years, and ultimately, it was recognized how it helped to practice synthesizing activities while maintaining a rigorous approach to hypothesis-testing with qualitative data. The original affinity diagram method implies four steps: creating cards that display one concept only, shuffling the cards, grouping them and finally creating titles for the clusters. It is highlighted how the grouping process should be carried out in a non-logical manner, letting individual intuition lead the activity. Clustering cards may be repeated infinitely until interrelationships between them can be concisely explained. (Scupin, 1997) The method facilitates sensemaking, as it pushes the researcher to funnel information coherently in respect to the research objectives.

Implementation

Affinity diagramming started by reviewing the tags assigned to segments of interviews during the thematic analysis. Throughout the whole process the focus was on transcribing facts objectively from the Excel sheet, leaving bias and judgements aside. Working with descriptive and interpretative tags was complex, as themes needed to report a level of abstraction, without becoming too vague. Patterns emerged and allowed to cluster post-its in six groups, referring to various actions taken during organizational and clean-out processes; while cluster titles were more general and referred to the overall practice and attitude that could be reconnected to the actions. The result consisted of six final themes.

4.2.5 Themes

Adaptation and Reconfiguration

As remote working became the norm, living spaces started being more crowded. Most of the activities carried out in designated spaces outside the house had to be done inside. This led to reviewing the configuration of spaces and functional areas to accommodate multiple household members' needs and schedules. Moving furniture to set up secondary workstations called for clean-outs of entire bookcases and cabinets. For some, this process prompted the idea of arranging dedicated hangout and entertainment areas to use collectively during free time.

Avoiding commitment to material things

Some younger people dedicated their time to sorting out belongings from past years and developed an aversion towards storing and having things around they do not use daily. Avoiding commitment to physically owning decorative and nonfunctional items is a mindset that, in some cases, also transfers to the digital dimension. De-cluttering the digital space one uses every day for work or study similarly brought peace of mind. Finally, some deeply embraced the attitude and expressed the desire to completely detach and lose dependency on anything material or digital within the next few years.

Preparing for later years of life

Social restrictions and availability of time brought people in their 60s and 70s to think ahead and prepare their belongings for the later years of life. Recognized as a very time-consuming task, some started sorting through boxes in their attics and basements in the hopes of lessening that burden to their descendants, categorizing things to give away to children and grandchildren. Informal ways of making a will included marking items with written notes and recording vocal notes explaining their origins and meanings. This resulted in being left with lesser valued, damaged or unwanted items that ended up being tossed away or donated to charities. The first year of the Pandemic resulted particularly challenging from the

**Dealing with
dead relatives'
belongings**

emotional standpoint, as loss and grief pervaded families around the globe. With the departure of relatives, many found themselves dealing with their earthly belongings. Handling them was physically and mentally demanding, as quantities of still functional but unwanted objects had to be removed. The size of objects and furniture and available time to get the work done took a toll on those responsible for preparing the space for new tenants wanting to rent or buy the property.

**Keeping, fixing,
reusing**

For some, sorting through belongings and spending time inside did not entail de-cluttering or discarding of any sort. Rather, they put effort in re-organizing things, fixing them when damaged and repurposing them. Just like they are used passing down things such as ski suits, or hiking equipment, as a family habit, they found gratification in gifting unused drawing and coloring material to nephews. Some tried to teach their children to repair instead of buying new.

**Postponing
decisions**

When emptying shelves or old drawers from old things, those in-between decisions on what to keep, donate and discard and luckily had available space took advantage of it. For some, it is a habit, having a 'dumpster' space in the outskirts of the house, where everything goes temporarily. It allows them to postpone decisions and wait out to see if anything they kept can come in handy later, ultimately giving them great satisfaction for their tendency to hold on to things. However, it is also recognized how risky it is to adopt this hoarding mindset and the importance of addressing the situation now and then to avoid making the space inaccessible.

It was evident that investigating 'the tangible' shed light on a multi layered and highly complex subject matter, that is relationships and relationships' management through material items. The exploratory nature of the first research session contributed to open up the topic with participants and a further and shorter session was prepared.

4.3 Investigating the Intangible

4.3.1 Objectives

The second session of primary research aimed at exploring people's established and emerging practices in managing relationships in the household through material objects during the Pandemic period. In particular, the research focused on:

- shifts and changes in behavior and habits on behalf of participants or household members;
- plans and preparation activities for the future;
- the role played by material possessions in those processes.

4.3.2 Participants Recruitment & Characteristics

Coherently with the first session, convenience sampling was applied while still prioritizing diversity in lifestyle, occupation, and living situation.

For this session, seven Italian people, ranging from 24 to 26 years old, were chosen. The main criterion for selection was not defined by whether people had managed material things, but rather if they recently underwent changes as to what concerns their household composition, such as those who moved back to parents' house, or started living with a partner or room-mates, as relationships were the focus of the inquiry. Through that area of enquiry, the management of material possessions was investigated. Once again, familiarity and being at least acquainted with all participants allowed a more comfortable sharing of potentially sensitive information.

The Intangible Research Session **Participants**

Name	Age	Occupation	Living Situation
Federico G.	25	Graduating student	With parents and brother
Lorenzo	24	Sales intern	With parents
Simona	25	Accounting intern	With parents
Antonio	24	Accountant	With parents and brother
Federico C.	26	Graduating student	With parents
Giovanna	24	Student	With mother and sibling
Elisa G.	24	Nurse	With parents and sibling

4.3.3 Employed Method

WhatsApp-based Interviews

The instant messaging app 'Whatsapp' has been utilized as a tool to collect responses in a time-convenient manner and to allow participants to reflect upon questions and articulate their responses. Indeed, this method could be considered a kind of epistolary interview. Epistolary Interviews have been used and first conceptualized by Margaret Debenham in her Ph.D. in 2001 when investigating The Open University undergraduate students' experience with long-term health problems (Debenham, 2001). The researcher demonstrated how conducting personal, in-depth interviews via email provided multiple benefits for the interviewer and interviewees. Other than being able to gather and analyze responses in written form more easily, epistolary interviews allowed participants to answer questions when they felt comfortable enough to take on the task rather than being required to do that face-to-face at a pre-arranged time. Moreover, this positively impacted the quality of collected answers, as participants had time to read, digest, and reflect upon given questions. (Debenham, 2007)

Indeed, epistolary interviews are conducted in an asynchronous manner, which does not require interaction between parties at the same time. Instead, participants are empowered by choosing the preferred time, setting, and quantity of shared information when answering questions. In this sense, providing a greater sense of control and

privacy to send an answer is particularly meaningful and impactful when research questions regard highly personal experiences and sensitive topics. (Ratislavová & Ratislav, 2014)

Finally, instant messaging phone applications for qualitative interviewing, specifically 'Whatsapp,' have been recently studied and referred to as 'MIMI,' Mobile Instant Messaging Interview. (Kaufmann & Peil, 2019) Among other advantages, such as the possibility to conveniently enrich answers with audios notes and images, and scalability, using an instant messaging app allowed immediate feedback on the understanding of questions and coming back for clarifications and follow-ups.

Implementation

Combining the pros of asynchronous communication and instant messaging, in-depth interviews have been prepared by elaborating a few questions following the research session's objectives. Participants were sent an introduction message, asking if they would like to take part in this thesis research phase and informing about the fact that it was going to be conducted over Whatsapp, and they had seven days to send their contribution. The topic of interest was introduced as an investigation around people's living situations, their household relationships and involvement in dealing with belongings during National Covid-19 Lockdowns. It was also communicated that the interview did not present polar questions, rather areas of discussion that they would have had to express themselves upon. For this reason, they were invited to respond through audio messages, as writing might have led them to condense answers and potentially excessively rework information. All contacted people agreed to participate and were delighted to hear they could take their time and send answers in a convenient and familiar manner. A few interviewees reached back to clarify a few points of discussion, and all answers were collected within five days. Not all of them responded through audio messages, and in some cases the author asked a few follow-up questions regarding an emerged topic.

Interview Guide

- Describe your current living situation, roommates, parents, partner...
- Mention any changes in your living situation in the past months.
- Tell me about how you are living changes in your routine, if any.
- Name a few positive and negative aspects of your current living situation.
- Describe any house projects you carried out in your private and shared areas. (work from home set-ups, free time dedicated spaces...)
- Tell me about your plans regarding your living situation for the near future and how you are preparing for those. Describe any activity you undertook in regards to your belongings.

*the term 'living situation' refers to the degree of comfort and wellbeing determined by the space and surroundings, people, and overall atmosphere you live in on a daily basis in the house.

4.3.4 Preliminary Analysis & Synthesis

As answers from Whatsapp interviews started being received, they were digitally transcribed and translated from Italian to English. This process took about half an hour for each participant in total. Compared to the semi-structured interviews conducted in the first session, these answers were less dense with information, and note-taking resulted less challenging. This might be because the interview did not take place in a synchronous mode, and responses were not inspected as it would happen in a live discussion. Once again, transcriptions served as a starting point to elaborate qualitative information into knowledge for later design activities.

Thematic Analysis Implementation

Similarly, to the analysis of first session interviews, after reviewing digital transcripts and notes, relevant quotes were copied and pasted on an Excel sheet, and marked with the corresponding interviewee's name. Each quote was summarized to have a shorter, descriptive note on a dedicated column for easier reviews afterward. As the process continued, tags were assigned to each line, marking them in a descriptive way. This allowed to categorize facts by their content and funnel information to reach. The nature of the discussion prompts might have led participants to spend more effort in describing issues that do not respond to the material dimension. Therefore a few comments were ignored in the process of analyzing and assigning tags.

Affinity Diagram Implementation

The process started a few days later, after having completed the selection of quotes and having assigned labels to all of them. Tags were assessed and compared. Information from each quote was considered and abstracted to create post-its. All colored notes were placed on a wall and moved according to their content. At this point a few tags were matched to create larger and more abstract themes. Indeed, reframing information was the main goal of this activity.

4.3.5 Themes

Discrepancies over lifestyle choices

Those who found themselves moving in with parents after having lived independently and in some cases abroad for an extended period of time went through some arguments with criticism regarding outer appearance and looks.

Lack of stimuli from outside

Some stated having thought about what to bring and what not to once they will finally move out. Being forbidden to wander outside led many youngsters to revisit their bedrooms in new manners and from different points of view. Many went through their childhood things for the first time in many years, and relived memories with parents before putting everything in boxes to store in the outskirts of the house.

Being respectful to household members

Some tried to dismiss the fear of being judged for staying too much in front of the computer or not being social enough, by helping with the cleaning routine and other household chores.

5

Synthesis

After having identified main themes from the Primary Exploratory Research phase, a final comprehensive analysis and synthesis were conducted. The informants' experiences are presented through a qualitative information flow that moves from a macro to a micro level understanding to fully render the multifaceted nature of people's attitudes and behaviors when handling personal and inherited belongings. This chapter's aim is to conceptualize emerging practices and finally converge towards an area of opportunity for following idea generation activities.

5.1 From Macro to Micro Narratives

The process followed in this chapter consists of reviewing the information gathered from the primary research phase, externalizing it through post-its, and applying abductive reasoning to draw connections. Abduction has been defined as “the argument to the best explanation. It is the hypothesis that makes the most sense given observed phenomenon or data and based on prior experience. Abduction is a logical way of considering inference or “best guess” leaps.” (Kolko, 2010) p 20 This was a cyclical process, repeated multiple times that allowed to make sense of a large quantity of qualitative data, which is referred to as reframing. (Kolko, 2010)

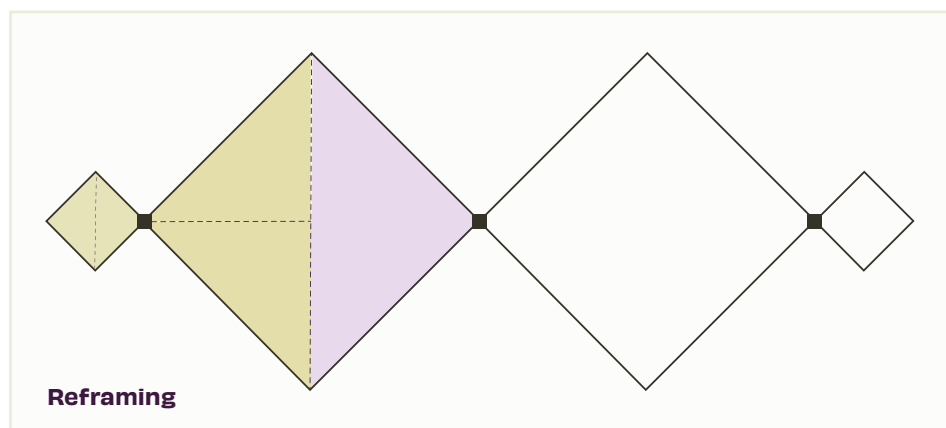
5.1.1 Crossing Exploratory Research Takeaways with Material Culture Learnings

The themes extrapolated from the Primary Exploratory Research phase provided real-life and situational information on what was discussed in the Literature Review chapter.

Making sense of the collected information to build a synthesized body of knowledge started by focusing on high level considerations that could represent the experiences of informants.

As the discourse on material culture was developed through an analysis of currently popular methods for tackling personal belongings, the participants' experiences were also related to those. No informant followed a particular method among the ones presented in the last chapter, rather, some were driven by preparing for the future, while others relied on their past experience.

The approaches had been previously identified by: ‘minimizing & discarding,’ ‘organizing,’ and ‘minimizing & preserving’ as a way to encapsulate the underlying intent of each. A loose categorization is



proposed by linking informants' actions and mental processes to one of the three groups as an attempt to frame their experiences and see how theirs differed.

– It can be stated that the minimalism approach was mostly adopted by younger people, who desired to get a jumpstart for their next phase of life, imagining living independently from parents, with roommates or partners. Their efforts were directed towards separating anything from their childhood years and those things that still resonate with them from they want to continue having around. The keepers included functional items but also things with memories attached to them, for some with the goal of displaying them, for others to bring with them but stored in a dedicated non-visible space.

– Those who did not have disposal as their primary objective dedicated most of their time to organizing, categorizing, fixing, and repurposing their belongings. It was also common to postpone decisions when available space allowed to store possessions temporarily.

– Finally, it can be said that preservation was the main goal of those who decided to take advantage of the lockdown months to prepare for the later years of life and or to tackle the belongings of a recently passed relative. Lessening the burden for the children and grandchildren that will inherit most things was an objective that coincided with choosing what to keep and preserve to gift to them.

Methods	<p>The Minimalists</p> <p>Minimizing & Discarding</p>	<p>Konmari</p> <p>Minimizing & Discarding</p>	<p>Swedish Death Cleaning</p> <p>Minimizing & Preserving</p>	<p>The Home Edit</p> <p>Organizing</p>
Informants tendencies	<p>Most common among young adults who want to taste the feeling of being autonomous and independent by drawing a clear line between their childhood space/belongings and those they want to bring in their next phase of life.</p>		<p>Used by those who experienced having to empty out deceased relatives' homes/apartments, and realised how much effort it takes to go through their belongings. They want to prepare themselves to not leave a burden on their sons/daughters.</p>	<p>Used by those who did not aim at decluttering, or who did not want to dispose of anything because they tend to postpone decisions or keep most things.</p>

Tab. 6 Informants' tendencies related to decluttering and organizational methods

**Miller, Lipman
Agency of things**

To dive deeper into collected information, a comparison with the most relevant findings from the material culture bibliography was conducted. This activity had a dual objective. Firstly, it aimed at crossing information to develop an articulated body of knowledge on the multifaceted practices of people handling material objects during the lockdown months. Secondly, it contextualized and reinforced them. The process started by reviewing notions obtained from the deeply studied material culture approach and preparing post-its to facilitate the cross-analysis of information. The most relevant concepts were transcribed with their authors' names and then placed coherently in terms of content on the canvases created for the preliminary analysis. What emerged from the comparison of notes is the confirmation that current practices employed to manage material things in the domestic space helped people to retrieve control in a painfully uncertain situation and led them to negotiate relationships with themselves and those around them, as proposed by Miller. The uncertain situations mentioned in the following paragraphs might be tied or not to the consequences of the Pandemic, wanting to declutter one's room, moving in or out of a new place, experiencing the loss of a loved one,



Fig. 31 Literature review concepts on post-its



Fig. 32 Literature review concepts related to Affinity Diagram

dealing with deceased relatives' belongings... What was common to all participants is that in all cases, managing belongings allowed them to retrieve a sense of control and those resulted in being important, transitory moments of life.

In all those processes, the agency of things does not lay within them but manifests once they are moved, exchanged, and even disposed of. Therefore, to cite Douglas' theory on dirt, it is when material objects cross the boundaries of their categories, by the choice one makes around them, that their intrinsic power shows. Therefore, it can be stated that the peculiar power of people's belongings emerged when working on sorting out objects. It was evident how the satisfaction for taking a stance over material things coincided with the significance and impact those actions had on the human bonds developed around those things. It is then impossible to conceptualize managing material things separate from managing relationships. According to Miller, relationships develop through a tension among idealized & actual categories, meaning that a person is simultaneou-

**Douglas,
Theory on dirt**

**Miller,
Dual tension of
relationships**

sly considered pertaining to the general category of mothers, friends, partners, and a specific person with determined characteristics, flaws, and strengths. In this regard, the author proposed that objects play a crucial role in mediating the discrepancy between the two groups, idealized and actual, which is what happened to those informants who decided to dispose of their belongings. Sorting out things to keep, get rid of, and give away during transitional moments of life, be it moving, death cleaning, or deciding what to do with possessions inherited from deceased relatives, naturally entailed revisiting connections, acquaintances, and friendship. With each object, informants re-considered and re-ordered memories, and with those, the relationships of people associated with them. When downsizing or desiring to part with things, the ‘economy of relationships’ is a divestment practice that always comes into place among other more personal detachment practices. It is often a daunting process as it drives one to prune back relationships by divesting from material things, but it is natural, as, over time, bonds dissipate. Miller suggests that it is instinctive to keep those objects that most represent the relationship in its ideal state.

During the same process, material objects also function as the raw material to build and develop a heightened sense of self. Some stated mostly having kept things that do not have any memory associated with anyone and reconfiguring their available space to maintain their privacy, requiring isolation from the rest of the household. Similarly, detaching from childhood belongings might have represented a step towards envisioning living autonomously. Another informant striving for independence mentioned creating a dedicated space to hang out in occasionally with their siblings.

The abovementioned choices demonstrate how, even when one thinks of merely cleaning out space from clutter, they spontaneously reflect upon those surrounding them by managing material things. Finally, considering the act of gifting something to friends and family members when handling belongings as reported by informants, another concept supports the belief that material objects aid in better developing relationships. Indeed, according to Appadurai, the

**Miller, Appadurai
Gifting**

‘exchangeability’ of things as gifts is determined by their ‘socially relevant factor.’ By gifting personal items with a socially relevant factor, one draws lines, connections, and or boundaries that help to reinforce, maintain, or close relationships. Furthermore, Lipman proposed that by managing objects we negotiate pasts, presents, and futures; indeed, material things not only acted as the means for enabling and developing relationships but also facilitated envisioning lives in relation to those of friends’ and families’ into the future with a connection to the past. In conclusion, it can be said that retrieving control through material objects might have constituted the original intention behind wanting to move and sort through things at home during the lockdown period. However, those processes sparked much more complex and emotionally demanding ones, as evidenced from investigating the course of people’s experiences. Material culture played a crucial role in externalizing and materializing choices, which allowed the researcher to understand different aspects of those.

***A more profound
appreciation of things
will lead to a more
profound appreciation
of persons.
(Miller, 2010)***

5.1.2 Systematizing Practices

In the light of the considerations included in the last paragraph, a further activity was carried out to generate a critical comparison of informants' behaviors revolving around the management of material things. The process entailed two tasks simultaneously: clustering notes into larger groups according to their content and relating them in a 2x2 matrix. The process started by revisiting the post-its created and used in the Primary Exploratory Research phase's preliminary analysis. The notes were taken down from the wall and mixed to allow reviewing them through a brand-new perspective. By recalling the initially investigated topic of retrieving control over one's life through the management of their possessions and considering the correlation between the tangible and intangible the notes were grouped.

All participants retrieved control in the domestic dimension through material possessions, but their ways of telling stories and experiences differed. It was acknowledged how some described a more physical dimension, while others concentrated on the emotional side of experiences, as they came from the two sessions of interviews. Moreover, this initial clustering evidenced how the two groups of notes could be further divided into two distinct categories. Some participants put effort into re-adjusting and adapting. In contrast, others focused on describing how they minimized and rejected.

This conceptualization allowed to translate individual notes into macro-tendencies and simultaneously relate those to each other. Correlating actions around the idea of retrieving control corresponded to elaborating a 2x2 matrix. The tool, originally used for marketing purposes, is employed to compare, and represent a high-level understanding of the main behaviors extrapolated from the Primary Exploratory Research enquiry.

The post-its were organized on two polar axes, 'Readjusting' and 'Rejecting' initially, then changed to 'Maintain' and 'Dismiss' to describe the two opposite attitudes that emerged among informants, and 'The tangible,' and 'The intangible,' representing the material emotional dimensions on which their actions had effects on.

Managing objects in search of control physically made friendships, acquaintances, romantic relationships resurface, and deciding what to do with those corresponded to putting relationships in order and categorizing them in different ways. In all participants' experiences, it is visible how any object generates reflections on past, current relationships, and hopes for the future. Indeed, the visualization presents rectangular shapes that highlight connections from left to right, between the tangible and intangible dimensions according to the decision taken by the individual.

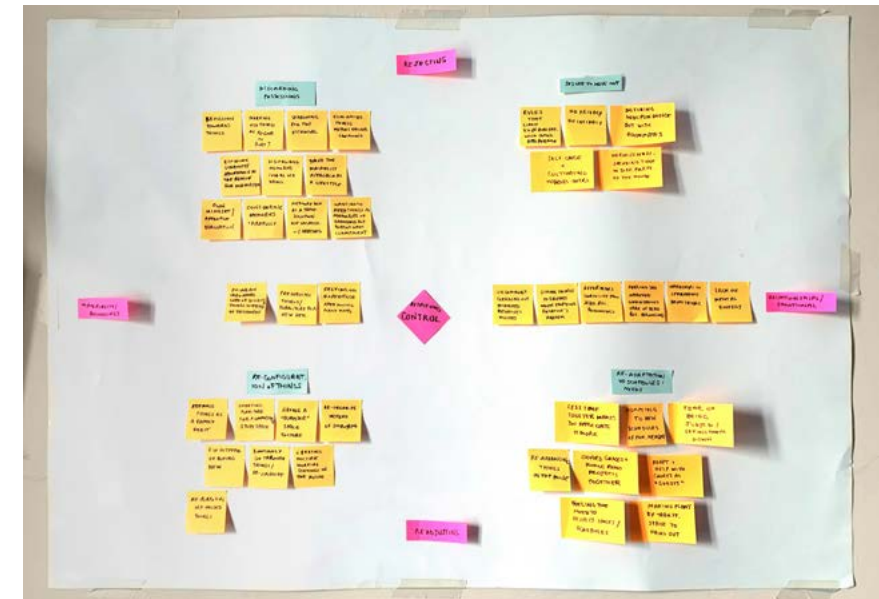
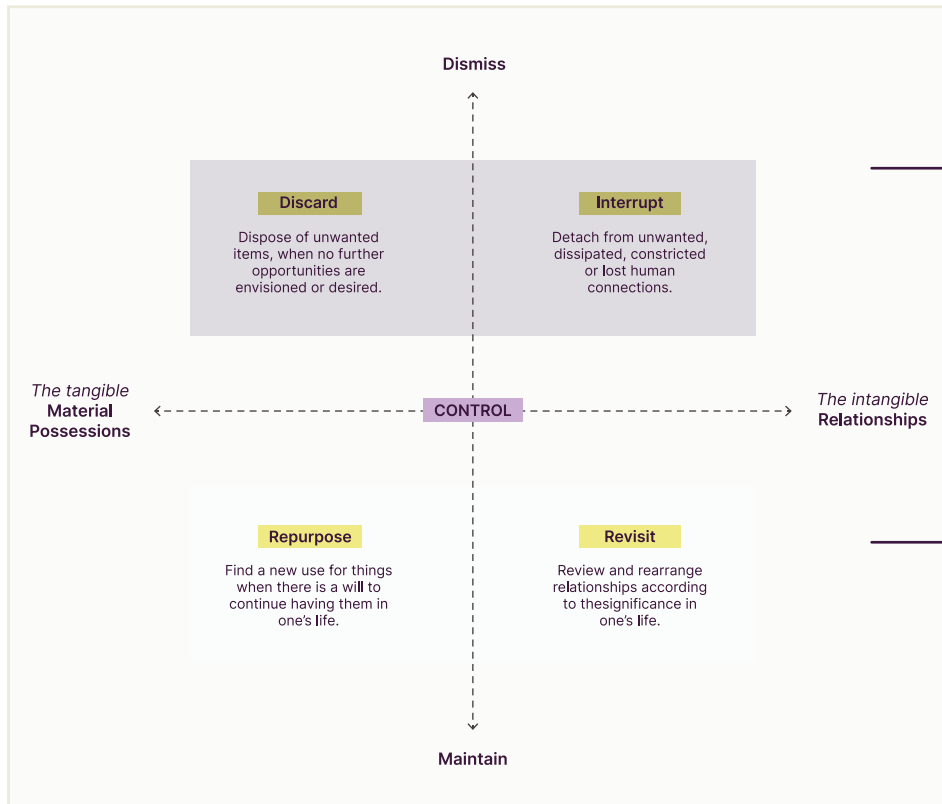


Fig. 33 2x2 Matrix of Practices on post-its



The top quadrants named **'Discard and 'Interrupt'** represent those actions geared at eliminating things in parallel with interrupting or confining relationships. These were extreme situations in which informants have decided to part with objects as they consciously or unconsciously desired to forget or avoid thinking about specific memories or detach from past situations.

While the bottom quadrants named **'Repurpose and 'Revisit'** aim at conceptualizing the re-adjustment and re-ordering of things and relationships. In this case, people were found readapting and preserving things as they wished to continue the relationships with the people associated with those, either in their lives or somebody else's, in the case they donated them.

Tab. 7 2x2 Matrix of Practices

This matrix works to comprehensively conceptualize people's experiences as it represents an array of behaviors that are not determined by demographic data or needs but depend on the multiple aspects that come into play when managing complex emotions. Indeed, both attitudes, 'maintain' and 'dismiss' embody processes that were shared by the vast range of people inter-

viewed, from the younger ones wishing to live autonomously and be self-determinant to those returning at their parents' home; from older people who decided to prepare their belongings for the later years of life to those responsible for handling recently deceased relatives' belongings.

5.1.3 Depicting Multifaceted Experiences

Conceptualizing dismissing and maintaining practices as the two polar actions when managing material objects represents the intermediate step in progressing from a macro to a micro-level synthesis. Indeed, they have been conceptualized as categories of behaviors to compare informants' experiences. But, once again, in Miller's words, it is about linking the local to the global and vice versa. Which is the reason why it is considered crucial to maintain the peculiarities of informants the focus of the analysis as much as the synthesis.

The following pages present relevant quotes from informants, that demonstrate the tight interrelationship between managing material things and its impact on relationships and social bonds. Each fragment of story is accompanied by a comment aimed at clearly capturing how material things externalize relationships negotiations, and eventually highlighting the complexity that is encompassed in such practices. Only in this way could the synthesis have provided a significant and meaningful foundation for later design activities.

"That bookcase I tackled to eliminate clutter and prepare a secondary work set up is now empty, nothing was saved, I saw everything as 'fogna' (dirt)." - "Right now I would like to eliminate my wallet when I'm outside the house, I cannot eliminate my mobile phone...I declared my phone as the only essential objects to carry with me, you could eliminate housekeys, and use your phone to unlock your house door, but then, at that point I feel like you would develop an attachment to an essential thing that could get quite dangerous."

Moreno has been striving for essentiality and non-dependency from material things. He explained his desire to minimize started from working independently as a game designer. He did not want to have piles of papers on his desk, and useless documents in his work computer. He continued to discard objects around himself, as he wanted to optimize his cleaning and dusting routine and after multiple cycles of decluttering, he was happy about the results. He mentioned wanting to extend this mindset to living his life, aspiring to live with less things possible. However, when he recently lost his granddad, to whom he was very close, he found himself indecisive about his newly adopted mentality. He explained making an exception by keeping his magnifying glass, and having reasoned deeply about what to take, giving himself a limit of only one item. He felt uncertain even about keeping one thing, as it is something that he will not use and will sit there. In his case, preserving the belonging was seen more as an obstacle, than a relief after losing his granddad. Leaving most of his things behind probably helped him more in interrupting the relationship, as he desired from the beginning.

"Since I have so many things and trinkets in my room I have thought about if I could bring them with me when I move on my own. I like them all, but only a few things will come with me. I think I will take mostly practical things, but also decorative ones. For sure I will not take everything, it would be weird for my parents to see my room, that has been overflowing with stuff for years, suddenly empty."

Federico C. explained how he recently thought about his belongings, and what will happen to them when he eventually moves out from his parents' house. He identifies with an amateur collector of interesting-looking trinkets and owns many of those. Being small figures, wooden blocks, and souvenirs very dear to his heart, he will most likely bring those with him in his future living space, however, he mentioned being worried that his parents will find it too strange to look at his empty bedroom. Therefore, he was thinking about selecting things to leave there and to bring with him. While describing intentions for his future homemaking process, he reflected upon the fact that moving things to a new place to continue seeing them every day will probably have repercussions on his parents' life at home, where he lived for 25 years. In this case material things brought him to anticipate the feelings and empathize with them, consequently acting to limit the potentially negative effects of his moving process.

"We give things we don't want or need to friends and family. There is a cousin of mine which I look up to a lot, who finds pieces to repurpose through various acquaintances. For example, she has a mannequin from a seamstress that she dresses up according to the season and displays it in the living room as a form of art. I don't feel that creative but she is really good. I know I have art supplies and other things that I want to give to my cousin to use for crafts. I have always been used to passing down things and objects in my family, for example, we have never bought ski equipment because we have inherited that, or we borrow it from each other."

Gianluca explained how, decluttering moments as a family rarely include a trip to the landfill. He and his brother have been used to passing down and sharing unwanted things no matter if they were out of style. When telling about his recent experience with sorting through his belongings, he proudly mentioned a cousin of his, who creatively repurposes pieces of fabrics and small items on a mannequin and displays it in her home. He also described how he wanted to use an old lamp that had been sitting in the basement, but it required fixing. He then went to the local handyman, who they have known for years, and is famous for fixing anything. The repurposing of objects led him to revisit and re-state the kinship to his cousin and the skills of a man who has now seen many of their belongings for work reasons. Close or distant relationships are visibly intertwined into the practice of giving new life to material things, and consciously or unconsciously lead to remember and reevaluate social ties.

"I took advantage of this time to leave written notes of our belongings, we have a safety at the bank, and my son and daughter know how to divide their things correctly. Recently my daughter recorded a voice message of me saying what I want to do with my most precious possessions. I didn't do a testament because my husband doesn't want to. But I'm really relaxed now that the most important things are situated, and I know they will not be overlooked once I'm not here anymore."

Serena spent a lot of time sorting through boxes that had been left in the garage after her and her husband's move 8 years ago. She also emptied out her sister in law's apartment after her death. She explained how she decided to downsize, as her daughter lives in Sydney and is never there for long. She wants to make it easier for her family when they will have to deal with their belongings. She expressed how she de-cluttered and selected things to keep according to her adult children's taste and desire, how she did not want to make a will, but rather carefully think about what to leave and to whom with dedicated written and recorded notes.

"My uncle's friends came to pick up some things such as a hiking headlight, a hiking jacket, they were very close friends that shared a love for outdoor sports. I did not know them personally, but I got the chance to, and with some of them I chat on Whatsapp, we invite each other for pizza nights...It's like I met two new friends through my uncle, even though he is not here anymore."

Nicoletta had the responsibility to decide what to do with everything inside her deceased uncle's apartment and rental summer house. She was the closest relative that could take care of his belongings and spent months moving out things, as memories resurfaced from every thing she found. Some have been left there, as her mother will be moving into the space, but many are still temporarily sitting in her garage, as she cannot think about what to do with those. Her uncle's friends, who she did not know before, reached out to her asking if they could have something from his hiking equipment, pictures, and trinkets. Repurposing things, in this case, came from a request that she happily accepted. Preparing those items for them or letting them come and pick what they wanted led to the chance of introducing each other in a new context. From tangible actions, intangible opportunities were generated. Indeed, they did not only share stories about time spent with her uncle but found out they had common interests. Over time, a couple of her uncle's friends became her friends as well, as if the loss of her uncle and the wish of keeping his memories alive through managing his belongings set the foundation for new bonds.

"I could not go in there anymore, I just got a few of his items and my mother's. A few shirts, ties, a painting. But there were still so many things, I did not know what to do with them, I did not have any help from my sisters. They did not want to see his things anymore. So I sold the house as it was, the buyers were okay with still having many furniture pieces and things in it, so I accepted."

Cristina lost her father in 2020 and decided to sell his house. She explained the process went on very quickly, they did not expect finding a buyer so soon. In a few months she managed to retrieve a few clothing items such as, shirts and ties, which she would want her sons to wear, but knows they would be too out of style for them. According to Miller, those items she kept most represent their ideal relationship, rather than the actual one. She also got a painting, but nothing more. The majority of her father's and her mother's items were left and sold with the house, as the new tenants were okay with it. She mentioned not having the help of any of her sisters. In her case, it can be said the opportunity to retrieve her parents' possessions and make them continue living in their house or somebody else's was almost intentionally avoided. Freeing herself from things such as her childhood bed, and many other objects infused with memories from the past equaled to interrupting bonds with her parents the moment the house was sold. Her choice was extreme, but once again belongings materialized kinship dynamics.

"During the past few months I mounted a new bookcase, reorganized the old one and my wardrobe. With my parents we cleaned out things, old clothes and memories that we could live without. We then cleaned the basement really well; the idea is that of using it as a space to invite friends in the future. I want to leave my parents' house before next autumn, and I want it to be permanent, I foresee having to move often, but I'll come back once or twice a year."

Lorenzo has been studying abroad for years and preparing for more, but the Pandemic led him to return and spend a few months at his family house. During this period, he dedicated some of his time to deep clean and de-clutter the basement from childhood toys and books. The room which had been underused for many years, and his parents wanted to start preparing it as a space where he could go and hang out with his friends whenever he was home. In this case, managing material things coincided to physically detaching from childhood years, interrupting the relationship with the self from the past and acquiring a sense of self in preparation for the future. But simultaneously new opportunities to strengthen the bond with his family were generated by envisioning and building together a welcoming space.

5.2 Framing the Design Challenge

The synthesis presented so far mainly concerns moments of preparation and sorting out of belongings when in the process of managing things. To frame the design challenge, a few considerations and finally insights were elaborated to lay out a solid base of knowledge and confine an area of opportunity. Reasonably, age determined the nature of the decisions taken in the tangible and intangible dimensions, as preparing for the later years of life is more likely to be a practice carried out by middle aged to elderly people in a preventative way. Whilst having to deal with deceased relatives' or parents' belongings can, unfortunately, happen unexpectedly and at any age. The first process practically entails sorting through own material things, deciding what to keep for oneself, what to pass on to future generations, and finally what to discard for effective downsizing. The second process might be carried out with the support of other relatives, in other cases people go through it alone. Thinking about moving out from parents' houses is what, understandably, was common among informants in their 20s, some did it with the intention of moving out in a few months, others to project themselves in that period of life that they still have not planned.

These situations developed differently for each participant, as they adopted different practices determined by their living situation, context, habits, and values. However, the intricateness of their situations and the role played by material objects in their processes characterized them all, regardless of their age. Complex emotions were woven into the experiences of both younger and older people, which led to organize insights not according to age, but to the two main dimensions analyzed until here, the emotional and physical one.

5.2.1 Key Insights

Emotional Dimension

- Sorting out material things and subsequently deciding what to do with them is a process that is **significantly dependent on personal experiences**, knowledge and acquaintances accumulated through the years.
- When fully embracing a minimalist mindset, and wanting to **avoid commitment** to owning material things, keeping **memorabilia** from **deceased relatives** might feel like an obstacle.
- Preparing belongings for the end of life is a **daunting task** as it pushes one to think about a future, they will never see nor experience.
- Deciding **what to pass down and to whom** when downsizing for the end of life is **strenuous and emotionally demanding** as it requires to make decisions around very significant objects.
- **Managing dead relatives' belongings** is a highly uncomfortable process for individuals and attempting a conversation even among close relatives presents hardships. Death is still a taboo topic.
- Issues of **competitiveness or complete disinterestedness** might arise from family members when handling inherited material things, thus increasing the burden of the process.

Physical Dimension

- Physically moving, organizing objects is **exhausting**, both in case of owned and inherited belongings, and might require the intervention of movers/truck rental.
- **Categorizing objects** for future receivers is **time consuming**.
- The **size** of material objects is **determinant** in making decisions. Space constraints lead to higher chances of disposing of things.
- **Huge quantities** of material things inherited from deceased relatives **risk becoming waste**, while still functioning.

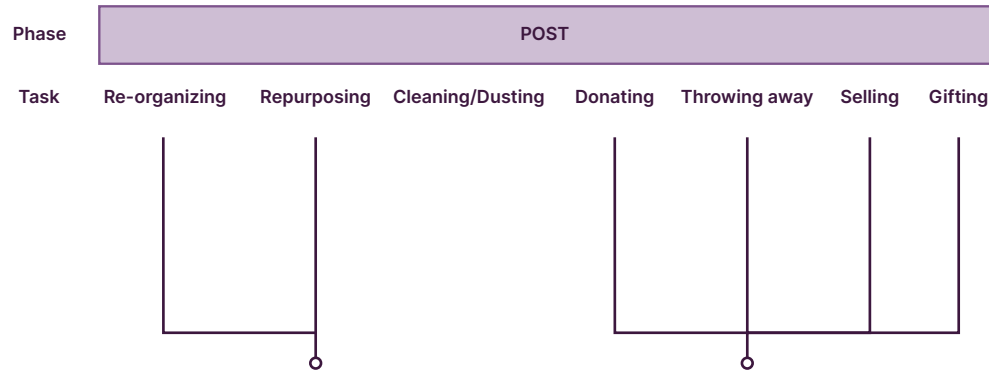
5.2.2 Opportunity Area

The role of material objects as enablers for negotiating relationships has been accurately illustrated through the quotes extracted from participants' interviews and research activities. Key insights highlighted the challenges that people experience when they must take decisions on what to do with their belongings or inherited ones. Those challenges derive from the fact that objects are invested with the power to negotiate relationships, which is what gives them potential. Reorganizing, repurposing, gifting, selling, donating, and throwing away objects are actions that potentially represent the cornerstones of relationships, as every time things are moved from their category, they fulfill their role as social enablers.

In the light of this discussion and considering the journey map elaborated in the last chapter, the post phase has been chosen as the main opportunity area for design.

Phase	PRE		DURING		POST						
	Assessing Possessions	Temporarily Moving Possessions	Decluttering (1st cycle)	Decluttering (2nd cycle)	Re-organizing	Repurposing	Cleaning/Dusting	Donating	Throwing away	Selling/Gifting	
Moreno	X			A	A						
Serena	X			A		B					
Monica	X			A							
Gianluca	X	A									
Nicoletta	X	A		B							

Reorganizing, repurposing, gifting, selling, donating, and throwing away objects are actions that potentially represent the cornerstones of relationships, as every time things are moved from their category, they fulfill their role as social enablers.



It was fairly easy to manage things in case they needed to be reorganized or were deemed fit for repurposing, maybe in a different part of the house. Those who wanted to preserve things for future generations, might have needed to find an appropriate storage solution in peripheral parts of the house. A few might have considered objects relatively too worn out to pass on or did not want to put effort in finding a new owner and decided to bring them to the landfill.

While, in case people did not have space to keep things or for other reasons, it was harder to choose what to do with them. Gifting was the preferred solution, to see things in the hands of a close and dear person. Those who found themselves responsible for tackling deceased relatives' belongings with no space for storage, needing to urgently move out of a student apartment, or emptying out a house for selling, were left with bulky furniture, kitchen utensils, dining ware, décor pieces and much more.

Informants explained having used a mix of solutions according to the situation.

According to the endowment effect, tested by psychologist Daniel Kahneman, one tends to over evaluate an object when they have owned it even only for five minutes, as it has been invested with much more than its economic value. (Kahneman et al., 1990) Being biased might have led people to store as much things as possible and adversely react to the thought of having to give things away. Indeed, for most informants, having to throw things in the trash or calling movers to bring them to the landfill created emotional discomfort.

Most of those items are ordinary, but emotionally relevant; they are not easy to give away, as they are already present in most houses, but hold a special place in people's memories. Indeed, the word 'unwanted' is here used to refer to those things that do not have a physical space in people's houses anymore but are still wanted to live. Unwanted material things have enormous social potential, as they have been serving as the basis for relationships for their owners in the past and might help establish and mediate more in the future. It is in that realm of common unwanted belongings that lays space for innovation.

According to the endowment effect, tested by psychologist Daniel Kahneman, one tends to over evaluate an object when they have owned it even only for five minutes, as it has been invested with much more than its economic value. (Kahneman et al., 1990) Being biased might have led people to store as much things as possible and adversely react to the thought of having to give things away.

5.2.3 Rethinking repurposing practices

From what was discussed in the last paragraphs, it can be stated that the design solution will not have the avoidance of landfilling as the main value proposition, but that of allowing the passing down and gifting of items to establish and negotiate more social bonds in the future. A few considerations and a HMW question set the foundation for the next phase, ideation. The origin of the formula is attributed to Min Basadur, (Berger, 2012), and today it is a largely used tool that aims at framing opportunities and encouraging innovative thinking.

The current context offers extremely outdated disposal services, which are based on a materialistic vision of things. Indeed, they were generated from the idea that material things' only value is that of functioning to carry out certain tasks in one's life. The main options to give away material objects currently are:

Donating to secular or religious groups

Such as Caritas, churches' organizations, as a way to dispose of things allowing one to feel virtuous, and less guilty about discarding.

Selling in second hand or vintage markets

On dedicated apps and websites, as an opportunity to gain back some of the money originally invested. Especially preferred if the item is in high demand in the ongoing market.

Throwing away and landfilling

In general waste bins, chosen when one wants to avoid the effort of finding and interacting with people to give things away.

These methods are very limited and limiting. Available services to give away things seem to be lacking solutions that take into considerations the complex emotional challenges and potentialities intertwined into those.

In the era of overconsumption, a paradigm shift is needed, along with an effort to amplify the spectrum of available solutions. We need to switch from considering things from a materialistic point of view and implement solutions that contribute to continuously enhance their social and emotional agency in the future. The considerations generated from the research could aid in elaborating innovative ways of enabling and living those processes.

Items that people do not want or cannot keep any more have been foundational for relationships and continuous social exchanges, so...

HMW enable ordinary but emotionally relevant material belongings to continue having this role for their new owners?



Co-design

The seedling for innovation represented by the HMW defined the frame in which the ideation was going to be carried out, and led to preparing to collaboratively explore preferable solutions for future repurposing practices.

The co-design process evolved through two workshops, the first was conducted with younger people, the latter with a mixed age group. Insights from the first workshop guided the second one, where the topic of conversation was steered from sharing to donating items.

6.1 Framing Activities

6.1.1 Collaborative Practices within Service Design

From the very beginning of this research, people and their experiences with material things have been the focal point. The nature of the primary research phase was generative, meaning that it was the direct interaction with informants that led to how the following steps were conducted.

From a few decades, Service Design practitioners have been utilizing moments of confrontation with potential future users to enrich the design process and generate ideas on existing and to-be products and services. It has been highlighted how, from the widely spread user-centered ‘passive’ design approach in the U.S. where the user was seen as an ‘object’, there has been a shift towards designing for larger scale and more complex systems led by Northern European countries, where the user is considered a ‘partner’. Co-design has been defined as “collective creativity as it is applied across the whole span of a design process” (Sanders & Stappers, 2008), and conceptualized as a practice within the broader frame of co-creation which indicates any form of collective creativity. Allowing users to participate to the design process entails a significant change in the role of the designer, as she/he works collaboratively with users as “as experts of their experience”. (Visser et al., 2005) To do that, professional designers often but not always collaborate with researchers and play the crucial role of designing tools to support thoughts elicitation and expression.

Co-design is used throughout the whole design process, but in the case of this thesis, potential users came into play in a specific phase. Multiple frameworks to conceptualize various aspects of co-designing and its purpose in the design process have been elaborated. To better explain and introduce the aim of the following workshops, two models are employed.

The first one was elaborated and presented by Sanders and Stappers in 2014, to showcase the interconnection and use of probes, toolkits and prototypes in a participatory design process (Sanders & Stappers, 2014). As reported by their diagram, the ‘making process’ has been subdivided into four phases and illustrates how the tools stand in respect to ‘designing for’, and ‘designing with’.

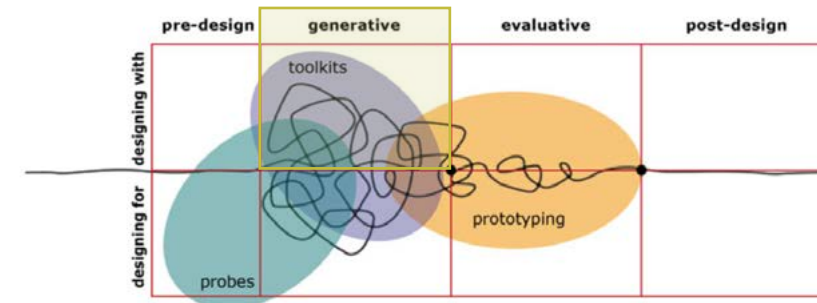


Fig. 34 Framework for Organizing the Tools and Techniques of Participatory Design, Sanders and Stappers, 2014

The first dot indicates the moment when a design opportunity is identified, while the second one the moment in which the product/service goes into use. The co-design workshops conducted in this thesis mainly see the use of toolkits and tools to generate thoughts and reflections in the fuzzy front end. Moreover, considering that participants are invited to imagine new ways of giving away things and allow their relationship enabling power to continue living, it has been considered how materializing thoughts leads to empowering participants and driving them to explore options with foresight.

The second framework considered to describe the co-design process is the ‘Collaborative Design Framework’ elaborated by Meroni, Selloni and Rossi, presented in 2018 (Meroni et al., 2018). Considering the four phases of the double diamond process, discover, define, develop, deliver, a polar axis has been traced to indicate that the subject matter of co-design can either be topic-driven or concept-driven. Moreover, the modalities in which the designer interacts with participants have been defined through two different styles: ‘active listening’ which “encourages the free flow of thoughts and flourishing of empathy and sympathy between participants” (Meroni et al., 2018, p.36), where the designer facilitates, and ‘thought provoking’ leading to reflect on criticalities and opportunities, where she/he steers the conversation. From the intersection of the two axes ‘Design subject matter’ and ‘Style of guidance’ four quadrants generate.

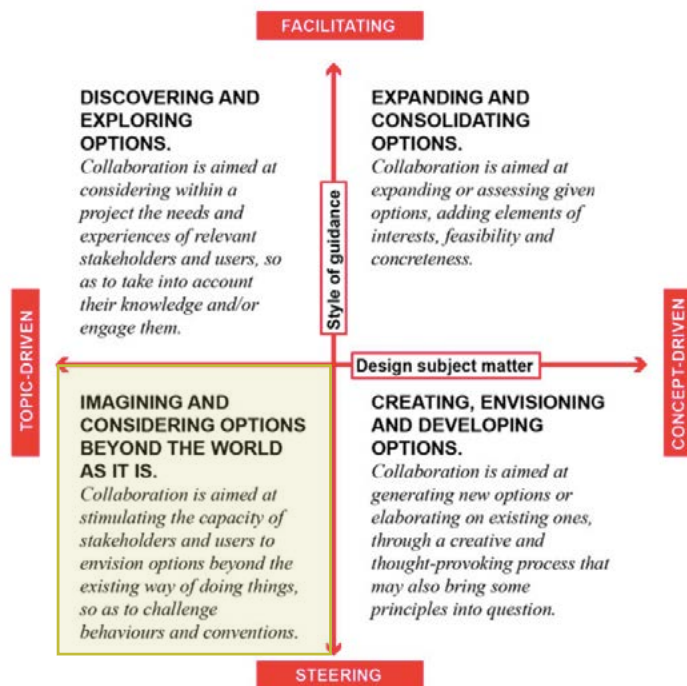


Fig. 35 The Collaborative Design Framework, Meroni, Selloni, Rossi, 2018

Design subject matter: Topic driven
Style of guidance: Steering
Double Diamond phase: Define

The co-design process in this thesis work has been framed as a topic driven activity, as after the synthesis of the primary exploratory research only a HMW question guides the process. Avoiding formulating a concept proposal in advance was decided because, once again, the voice of informants was considered the most valuable in enriching the already existing body of knowledge with their peculiarities. Regarding the placement in the double diamond phases, the two workshops could stand in the definition phase, however, in practice, both diverging and converging happened during those.

For the style of guidance, the thought-provoking style has been chosen, as it was necessary to push boundaries to consider options beyond the world as it is. In the final part of the synthesis chapter it was commented how current available options for giving away belongings are very limited and limiting, and involving potential future users in contributing to ideating those was considered fundamental.

Participation in the design process, as it is practiced today, is focused more on the exploration and identification of presumably positive future opportunities than it is on the identification and amelioration of adverse consequences. (Sanders & Stappers, 2008, 9)

6.1.2 Expected Output

Choosing to use co-design workshops as means to challenge ways of doing things meant trying to reach far away from the world as it is. The collected information was further elaborated by the author to identify vision, with the aim of working on the most promising ones to become scenarios and then concepts. Scenarios have been used to describe, visually and strategically, new possible products and services, through contexts of use, social ties, and meanings. In the design practice, scenarios steer “strategic conversations” for the future. (Manzini & Jégou, 2003) According to Manzini, designing the future entails deeply considering and analyzing the present. Indeed, the actions we take in the current moment have the potential to influence what will happen in the future. This means that the building forces that will determine the future are in the present and need to be strategically enabled. Therefore, drivers of change should be recognized and re-oriented to move in the preferred directions. (Manzini et al., 2009)

“The future is undoubtedly open and unpredictable, but the present contains the premises for any possible future: however tomorrow unfolds, it will be built on what is produced today. It follows that to imagine the future is to look at the present to see signs of what could happen: signs of a ‘possible future!’” (Manzini & Jégou, 2003, 16)

6.2 First Workshop

6.2.1 Overview & Participants

The first workshop invited participants to project themselves and their ‘material lives’ into the future, to reflect on the practices tied to certain material things and identify new potential ones for the same. Due to mobility restrictions and distance, the session was entirely carried out collaboratively through Miro. Two out of the four participants had already taken part in the primary research phase with interviews and were recruited through convenience sampling. All of them were current or former Italian design students in various fields in their 20s. For what regards their characteristics relevant to the research topics they were experiencing different living situations.

Date	12/03/2021	Duration	3 hours	Participants	4
Setting			remote	Sessions no	
				1	

First Workshop Participants Characteristics		
Name	Age	Description
Moreno	25	Has been living with his parents, but has been decluttering frequently his bedroom, and basement. He is planning to move on his own.
Beatrice	24	Has been renting an apartment with her boyfriend in Milan for a few months, but still has most of her things at her parents’ house.
Federico C.	26	Lives with his parents, never thought about decluttering, but has thought about his room and belongings once he will move out.
Ludovica	24	Lives with her parents, plans to declutter her room after graduating.

6.2.2 Goal & Objectives

The goal was articulated in smaller objectives, which were then used to brainstorm potential tasks and tools for participants.

To define new practices for the repurposing of unwanted belongings, by projecting oneself into the future to imagine reasons to keep or give things away for alternative uses and practices.

- To Identify which objects they will likely own in 20 years' time among the ones they took pictures of and the reason for their choice according to the described macro-trends.

- To Understand current practices that could be lost in time along with the objects left behind.

- To envision future, potential alternative practices that can generate around the objects left behind.

6.2.3 Preparation

Formulating a plan to achieve the aforementioned results required a few steps. Several factors were considered to plan the workshop, in particular the total available time and remote setting. Indeed, properly setting expectations and foreseeing the limits of a 1.5-hour idea generation workshop allowed to plan accordingly and optimize the design of tools.

Designing tools, formats and modes of interaction that could lead to extract relevant information and elicit more thoughts started by reviewing the goal and objectives of the workshop. Planning the content on which participants were going to discuss and their happened simultaneously.

To allow participants to envision their future lives, a few future-shaping macro, and micro trends covering topics such as, lifestyle, consumption, occupation, technology, and family structure were researched. A collection of trends was put together by reviewing the analysis of the Context chapter and extended by consulting multiple insights and forecasting reports by the following agencies "The Future Laboratory", "Nextatlas", "WGSN". The process to select the most appropriate ones consisted in maintaining the focus on ways of living that could affect everyday practices and the relationship between people and their material belongings. Finally, making a rough script to ensure mentioning concepts in the clearest manner possible and to guide participants through the activities was crucial.

Macro and micro trends shaping the future

Plurality of family structures

- Split/Blended families
- Multigenerational families (verticalization)
- One-person households, single mindset, uncoupled living

Consumption Modes

- Individual growth and self-enhancement
- Sharing economy/Collaborative consumption
- Lifelong learning/learning economy
- Demand transparency, driven by ethics rather than self-interest, brands as allies

Living

- Rurban Revolution: return to villages, embracing small communities and brands, living hyperlocally
- Bricolage living: identities can be assembled, arranged, collected, they are not defined by age, race, gender anymore
- Introspecting lifestyle, slow living
- Learning isolation management

Technology

- Automation
- Datafication

Occupation

- Working longer/retiring later
- Experience driven careers
- Hyper local co-working communities

6.2.4 Tasks & Tools

This section presents the process and activities experienced by the participants during the workshop, the way they interacted with the tools, with each other, and finally an evaluation of each activity.

A few days before the workshop

I Photo Elicitation

The day before the official workshop, participants received a digital invitation through WhatsApp, an image with the title, duration, and link to the Zoom call, which also included the description of a task to complete beforehand. They were asked to produce pictures of twenty objects, between furniture, decorative and functional items they had at home. They were encouraged to include variety of sizes, function, and typology, and they could even picture things owned by another family member, or be in communal spaces, such as the kitchen or living room, making them 'family objects'. A timeline was set, and all participants uploaded their pictures in the given pre-set Google Drive folder. This task was relatively easy and did not generate doubts, one participant underlined how she was currently living in a rented apartment, therefore some of the objects she included were not hers. This did not comply with the given guidelines, however, it was accepted.



Fig. 36 Co-design workshop invitation

The day of the workshop

2 Introduction

The workshop started with an introduction of the overall aim of the thesis work by the author through a dedicated canvas, explaining the context in which the solution will eventually be developed in, managing material belongings in transitional life moments. Reminding participants of the current state of the landfilling and give away systems allowed to clarify the objectives set for the workshop. Moreover, the roles of the designer and that of the participants were specified, communicating how during the

workshop, they would have been led, through the tools and the designer's assistance, to leave current views and pre-conceptions behind, in favour of adopting a disruptive perspective. They were also invited to act as collaborators, proposing ideas freely, and speaking their minds to clarify any doubt. This moment did not elicit any questions, the challenge was positively accepted, and participants were highly engaged, as they mentioned it was their first-time taking part in a co-design workshop.



Fig. 37 Co-design Introductory canvas

3 Rich context & Self-projection

Aim This activity aimed at making participants aware of trends that might impact their way of living in times to come. This step also functioned as a warm-up activity which invited them to critically reflect upon the implications of such tendencies on their future lives.

Structure The canvas was designed to visualize the inputs first, organized in circles of different colors, purple for areas of interest, beige for specific trends. They were intentionally spaced out to allow comments. The lower section of the canvas only presented a question with space to complete the call to action.

Implementation After a brief presentation of each area, participants were asked to discuss collectively on their thoughts regarding them, and then to individually project themselves in future years when those might become true for themselves as well. They collaboratively decided to choose a color for their post-its so to organize the visualization. This writing out part was carried out individually and then shared.

Comments The trends resulted quite relatable and engaging, and the discussion was enriched by case studies proposed by participants that emerged throughout. Some of them reflected more on a large scale and making generalizations, while others undertook the task by describing their personal situation and potential developments into the future.

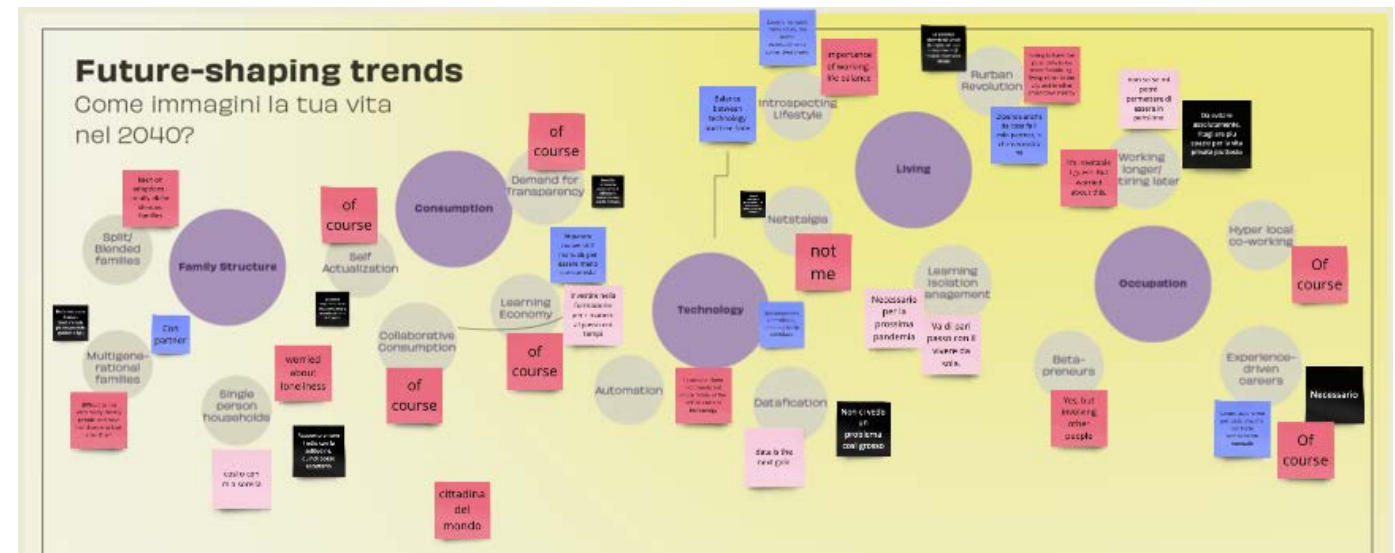


Fig. 38 Co-design Future-shaping trends Canvas



Fig. 39 Co-design Participants

4 Time Travelling

Aim In this case the aim was that of understanding how participants selected the items they expected to have in the future.

Structure This task was included in the first canvas, to allow glancing at notes and points from the previous discussion.

Implementation Participants were introduced to the 'Items repository', which was organized in columns, one for each participants and their respective objects' pictures. The travelling in time task was presented by the author inviting participants to select five of their previously photographed items considering the discussion regarding their future lives and later to explain their choices. They drew out shapes to delimit their space, and while selecting objects, a few participants commented that they would choose less than five if possible, indeed one only put three. Discussion on the choices of objects mainly regarded their attachment to things, how they remember those as a childhood token and also their wish to keep an interest in certain activities in the future. One participant highlighted how he specifically chose things that did not have any link to specific persons, rather they were objects that only regarded him, his values, and his interests.

Comments

This activity was satisfactory in terms of creating awareness around their potential future actions regarding their possessions and linking those to how participants envision themselves. The connection between chosen items and envisioned lives was not immediate and thoroughly articulated, with wishes and hopes guiding their decisions.

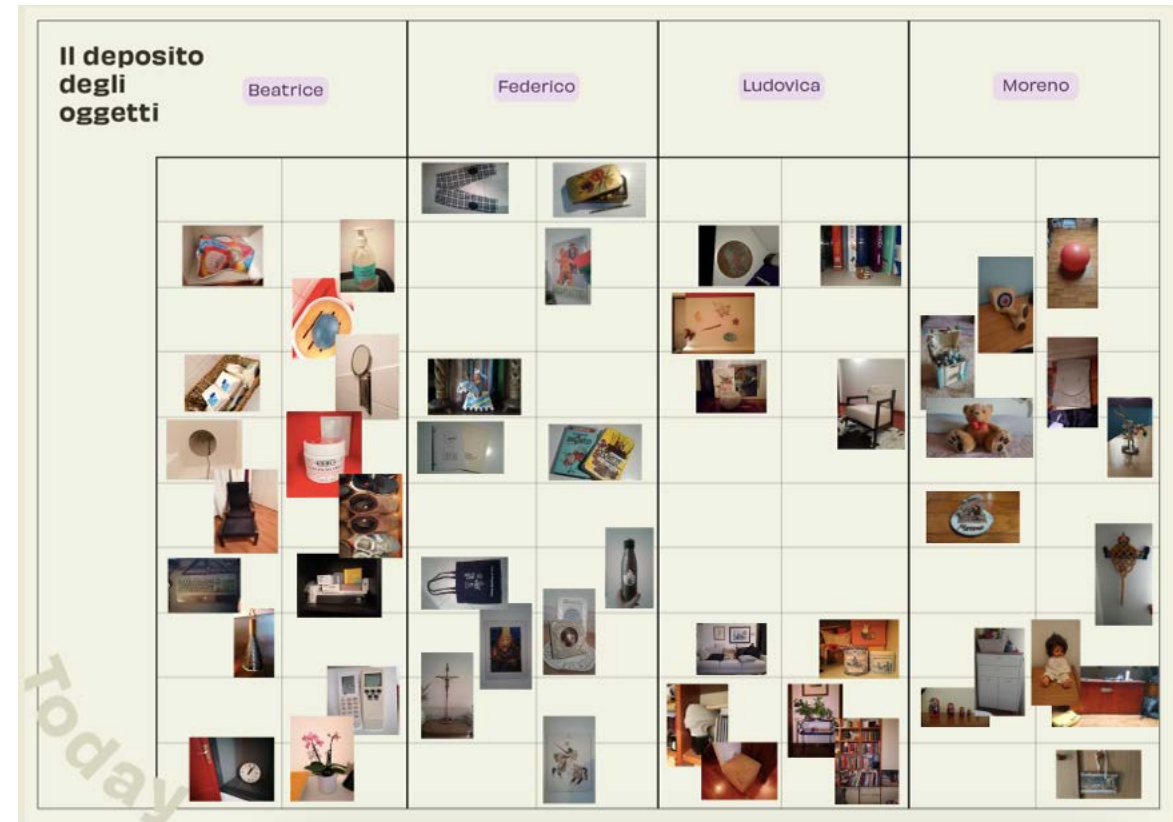


Fig. 40 The objects repository and Travelling in time Canvases



5 Current and alternative future practices

Aim This final task aimed at sparking reflections on the items left behind through their previous choices. Specifically considering the peculiar practices revolving around those things that would go lost together with relationships.

Structure The canvas was, once again, organized in two horizontal sections, both only presenting a question initially. Invited to work on the top part, participants were asked to select a few items from the items repository and bring them in the canvas, individually reflecting upon their choices and noting thoughts with their colored post-its.

Implementation Part A

This task was interpreted and carried out differently by the participants. One of them focused on commenting the technological relevance and the relative obsolescence of a few items, meaning that the lost practices would be intrinsic to the advancement of technologic innovations. While the rest commented more on personal and family practices revolving around the items, such as the use of a sideboard conceived for breadmaking, as a bar/liquor storage; a cow bell souvenir, used as a tool to call kids for lunch and dinners, now unused; and an old drawing crafted as a gift for the brother, symbolizing his recent tendency to now shop online for the presents.

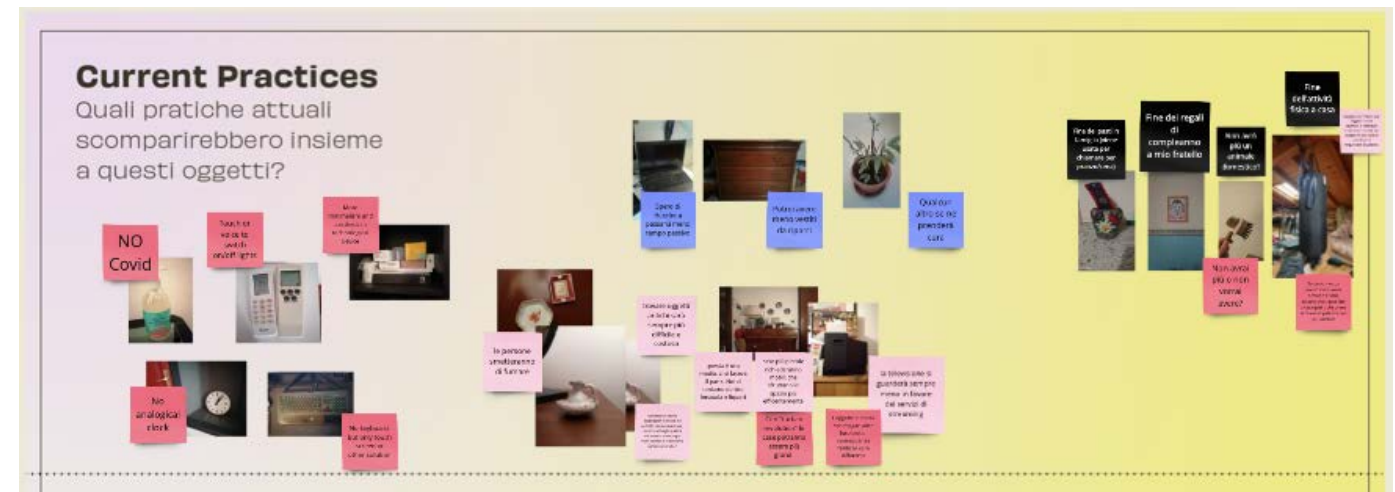


Fig. 41 The Current Practices Canvas



Fig. 42 Co-design Participants

Part B

The bottom part of the canvas was designed to allow them to comment and propose alternative practices around their commented objects by tracing arrows from the pictures above. It required participants to collectively think about what practices could generate around the objects they left behind.

This part was much more complex and was deemed as challenging by all participants. Indeed, the discussion started around the digital devices that would be obsolete in the next decade, reflecting upon how current recycling practices could be implemented and better systematized. One participant recalled the attention to the ultimate goal of the workshop, trying to shift the discussion to a more disruptive one, however this resulted in being stuck.

By listening to participants, the author realized it was necessary to exemplify the thought process with an input, therefore a comment on a consideration advanced by a participant of not having a pet in the future was made. The picture of the cat brush indicates that he and his close family owns a pet, but he thinks he won't have one in the future because he will live alone, and he does not have time for it. If the discussion shifts on taking care of the pet individually and collectively, we could imagine other ways of taking care of pets.

The group then proposed that it is foreseeable that, the pets of private citizens might be shared within the inhabitants of an apartment complex or condominium.

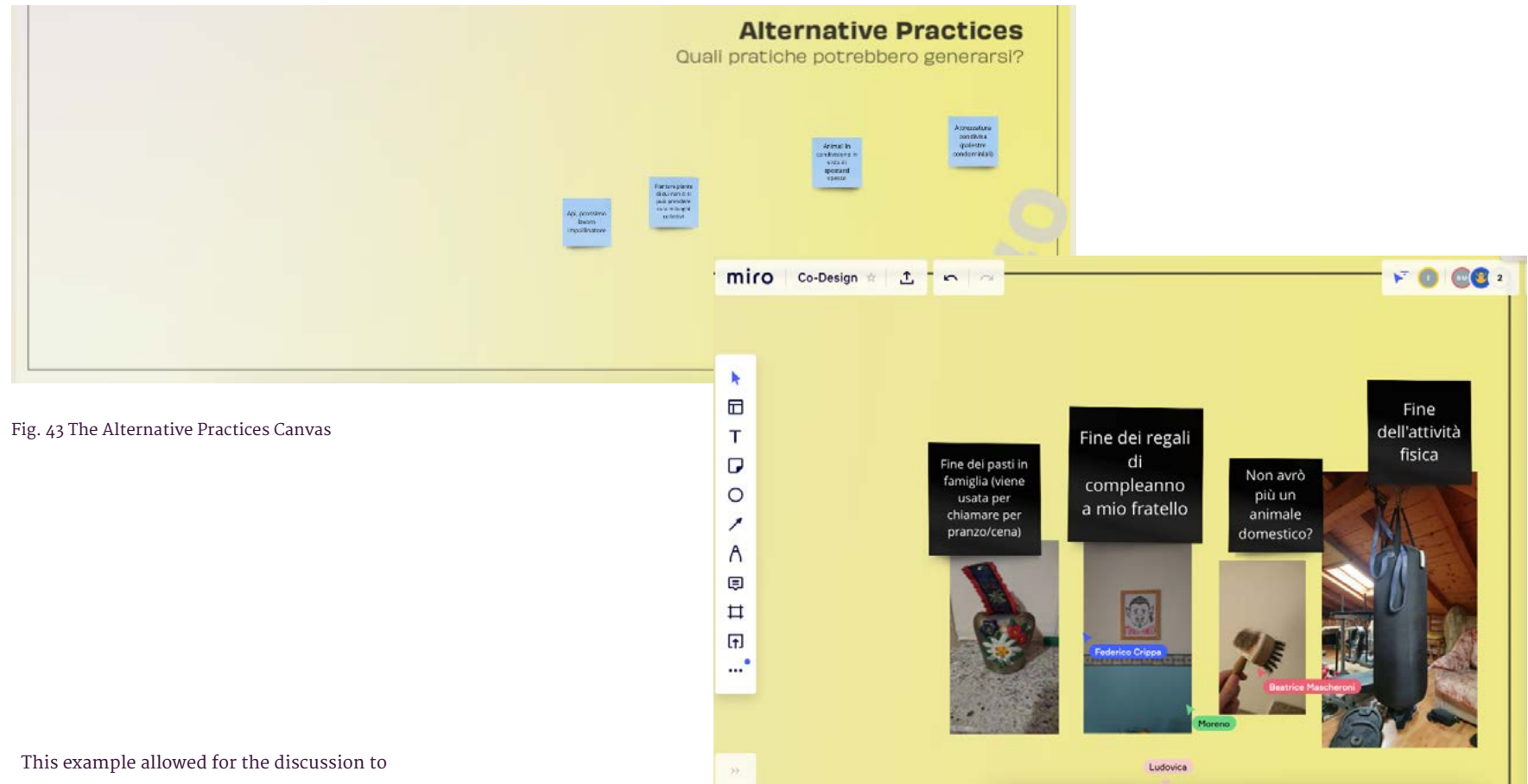


Fig. 43 The Alternative Practices Canvas

This example allowed for the discussion to progress a bit, but not significantly. The picture of a houseplant and foreseeing not being able to take care of it because of moving frequently was used to generate a similar practice, that of creating a shared space for planting and collectively taking care of greenery. Finally, one participant expressed her difficulties and highlighted how this activity did not come naturally to her. After having spent some time reflecting on more potential alternative practices, participants were made aware of the complexity of this task and thanked them for their contribution.

Comments

All things considered the final canvas could have had provided more inputs to aid with the proposal of alternative practices by participants. Introducing potential receivers of items might have allowed to think more practically about the questions. Despite the challenging activity, all participants tried to propose their thoughts and build on each other's considerations, once again tapping into examples and case studies that generated more comments. The objective of collecting multiple alternative practices from collective discussion was not totally achieved and the level of engagement started decreasing as the workshop was already running for one and a half hours then.

6.2.5 Synthesis & Insights

The workshop brought participants from a set of twenty objects and furniture pieces they currently have at home to envisioning the alternative practices around the items they expect to leave behind in 20 years' time. The ultimate aim was that of making them reflect upon the high social and relational value of things, and uncover ways to maintain it in the future, while also reducing the likelihood that they would become landfill waste. The activities with participants led to frame a few insights in forms of general considerations that would guide the following workshop.

Shared care

The shared modality for taking care of things, pets & plants emerged from the need or desire to move over the course of a time period could represent a way of progressing from the current to a new way of living with and giving away other kinds of items as well.

Sorting according to emotional value

The kind of objects that were left behind were rich of family or personal practices formed around them but were not included in the ones they expect to keep with them, because of space, and style preferences. However, once again the main criteria to foresee the ownership or not of the selected ones was the presence or lack of memories associated with specific people, and personal hopes for the future.

This proves again how things allow the mediation of relationship in-between people, as well as among individuals. When reflecting on the dual value of things, personal and collective, participants went back to the idea of sharing.

6.3 Second Workshop

6.3.1 Overview & Participants

Insights from the first workshop guided the second one, as the discussion was steered from sharing to donating unwanted belongings. The second workshop was held in person carefully attending to Covid-19 regulations. It was developed in two sessions for participants' schedules reasons, but the results are here presented collectively. Convenience sampling was used, participants were two people in their 40s and 50s, and one in his 20s. They were invited to discuss their recent experience in managing material belongings, reflect on potential receivers and talk about the implications of donating and giving away certain things to others from their past experience.

Date 08/04/2021	Duration 1.5 + 1 hours	Participants 2+1
Setting in person		Sessions no 2

Second Workshop Participants Characteristics

Name	Age	Description
Ilaria	45	Has been postponing emptying out her deceased mother's house. She passed away 5 years ago, but she was not emotionally ready to tackle her belongings until recently. She lives in a small village and is involved in the community, knows most of her neighbors and helps out at church dinners and gatherings, by baking, cleaning and tidying up.

Second Workshop Participants Characteristics

Name	Age	Description
Nicoletta	56	Has been dealing with surplus items and furniture for over a year. After the passing away of her husband, she has been left with a garage full of tools as he accumulated mechanical pieces for work and passion. She has also recently lost an uncle, who did not have any children, and she is the only one available to take care of his belongings. Finally, she is helping her 80 years old mother to move, after she received an eviction notice from the municipality.
Lorenzo	24	Is Ilaria's son, has been studying abroad for 4 years and moved between Menton, Paris, London and Berlin, with different roommates.

6.3.2 Goal & Objectives

To envision a multitude of directions for unwanted personal or inherited belongings, ultimately broadening the spectrum of current donation and gifting practices in a transitional moment of life, that could be moving, downsizing for end of life, having to manage inherited things from a deceased relative.

The goal is articulated in the following smaller objectives, which are then used to brainstorm tasks and tools for participants.

- Reflect on recent experiences handling personal or inherited belongings;

- Identify potential receivers of unwanted things;

- Discuss implications of giving away different type of things;

6.3.3 Preparation

Preparing the second workshop differed from the first one, as the interaction was less designed, but the points of discussion were more focused. No script was prepared, rather a discussion guide was made. Images collected from participants were gathered and printed to lay on a large canvas to facilitate discussion. Similarly, to the first workshop, material was gathered to aid the sharing of stories and invite them to compare their experiences. A few hours were spent gathering stories of people in similar situations from acquaintances.

6.3.4 Tasks & Tools

A few days before the workshop

1 Photo Elicitation

Like in the first group, a few days before the workshop, participants were asked to take digital pictures of objects from the contexts and situations in which they found themselves responsible to handle their or inherited belongings. No specific quantity was requested, they were just encouraged to include a variety of items, decorative and functional, of different sizes. A timeline was set, and all participants uploaded their pictures in the given pre-set Google Drive folder. Those who could not take pictures of the items were informed it was not a problem for the success of the activity.

The Day of the Workshop

2 Introduction & Warm-up

The workshop started with an introduction of the thesis research and the objective of the session: exploring alternative receivers for their unwanted belongings. They were invited to act as collaborators, proposing ideas freely, and speaking their minds to clarify any doubt.

As a warm-up they were invited to gather their pre-printed pictures or write out a word describing individual belongings. Afterwards, they were asked to share their experience telling about what they were doing, why and solutions they found to give things away. For two of the participants, who had been managing dead relatives' belongings, it was quite a sensitive topic, but they accepted the challenge nonetheless and started sharing their experiences.



Fig. 44 Primary working Canvas and Pictures

3 Discussing potential receivers

Aim To enter the crucial part of the workshop, and understand who could preferably receive unwanted items from participants', they were then invited to use printed purple circles to indicate potential receivers outside of their family circle for the items they saw on pictures and notes placing it next to them.

Structure They did it collectively and alternatively voiced out their opinion and reason for writing something, this created opportunities to auto-evaluate each other's' idea and make other ideas emerge. The conversation spontaneously shifted to donating to non-profit entities, who could benefit from things and appreciate them. They also reflected upon the implications of donating peculiar items, such as broken ones, or intimate ones.

Implementation

They did it collectively and alternatively voiced out their opinion and reason for writing something, this created opportunities to auto-evaluate each other's' idea and make other ideas emerge. The conversation spontaneously shifted to donating to non-profit entities, who could benefit from things and appreciate them. They also reflected upon the implications of donating peculiar items, such as broken ones, or intimate ones.

Comments

The activity took most of the time of the workshop, and allowed for interesting discussion, but in retrospect, providing inputs could have allowed the activity to progress in a more specific direction.

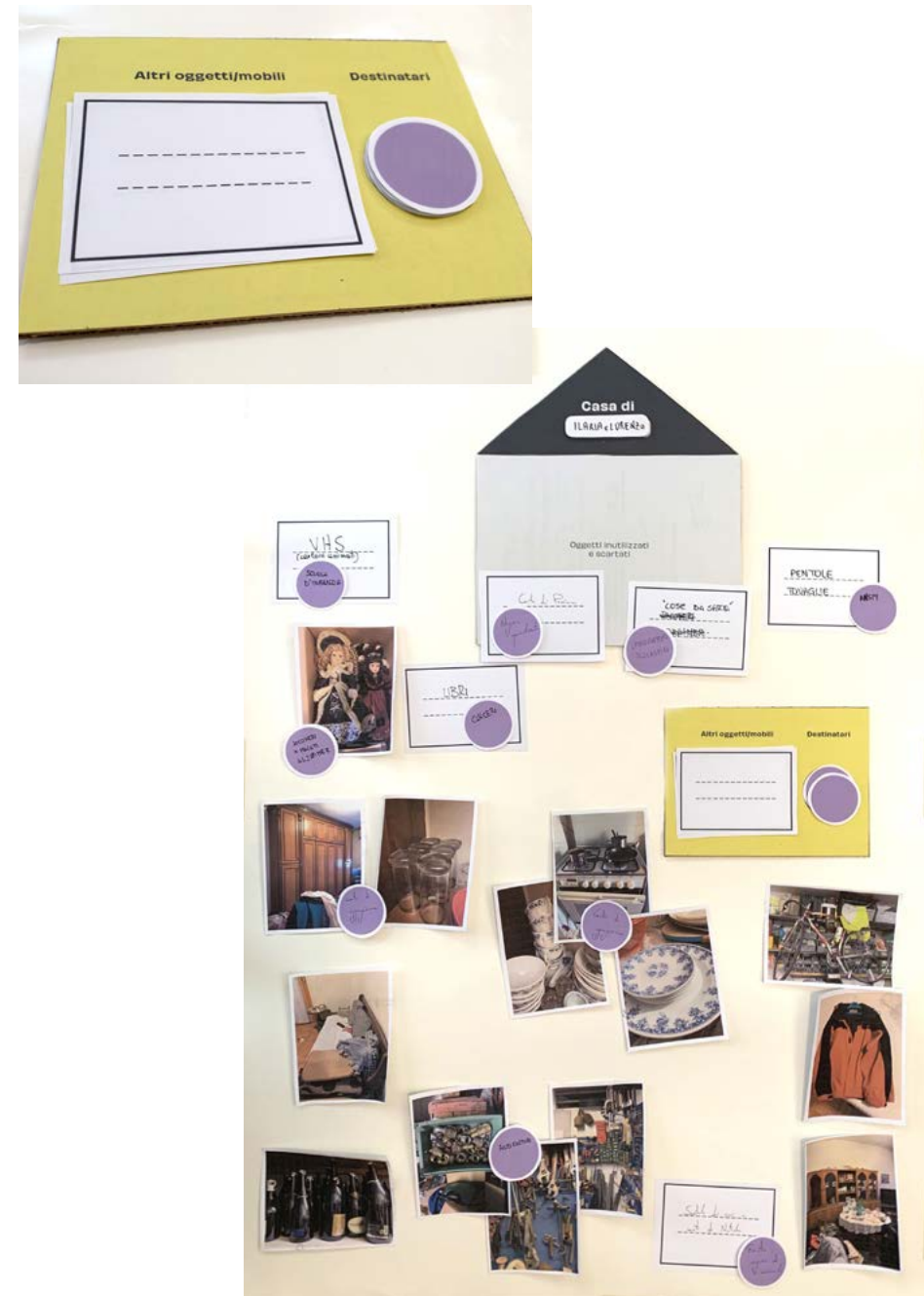


Fig. 45 Objects with Proposed receivers

"My uncle's hiking equipment could go to those associations like GAEP, CAI, which were very dear to him. They could go temporarily to those who do not have them or do not use them often...he would have appreciated it."
- Nicoletta



"My mum used to work as a seamstress, and I still have so much of that stuff, buttons, fabrics, a sewing machine, a mannequin...I would like to get something sewn with that material, but then the rest should go to someone that uses it for what it is." - Ilaria

"I think this kind of dolls could be donated to hospitals. My friend who works there told me that women with Alzheimer tend to care for dolls like they would children."
- Ilaria



"My coworker suggested that all kitchen stuff, pan, glasses, pots, could be used by off-campus students who move in empty apartments."
- Nicoletta

"Youth centers, self-managed spaces...these organizations are experiencing a hard time, they need a support network. This kind of stove, sofa, and plates would always be appreciated." - Lorenzo

"I struggle to give away my books, but I would really like to donate them to penitentiaries...the only issue is how to get in contact with them? The only way I can think of is through word of mouth or through the priests maybe..." - Lorenzo



4 Commenting stories from people in similar situations

Aim To expand the conversation and push participants to contribute further, the author shared stories of people in similar situations as them, who took unusual decisions in respect to theirs.

Structure

Implementation The following stories were told openly and with a conversational approach, finally asking what they would have done in the place of those people.

A) A middle-aged woman told how, as her father passed away, she went to get some small tokens such as ties, shirts, a papillon and a frame, but decided to leave everything else in his house, and then sell it. With of lack of space and no collaboration from her siblings, she felt it was the best choice.

B) Another case is of a man, whose children and grandchildren were numerous, letting them take a few items from his belongings, and then inviting them to an auction to get anything else they wanted.

At that point, participants were asked what they thought about those stories, what they would have done in the shoes of those people and why.

"Having to take decisions on personal belongings and those of a recently passed relative is very different, even if they were close to you. It is very hard to distinguish the functional from the emotional value of an object. I wish I would never have to give things away to avoid the risk of losing memories...but realistically, some things would be more appreciated by others, than just sitting there..." - Nicoletta

"I found valuable things in very hidden places, and she was not one that kept too many things... I could never let the house be sold before checking every little cranny and risking losing something meaningful." - Ilaria

"The greatest challenge when emptying out my mother's home is getting aware that they are things. When I successfully give things to friends and acquaintances I feel lighter on one side, but also a sense of heaviness and guilt, it is like I am ending part of my relationship with her, giving away those things I grew up with and she used until before passing away" - Ilaria

5 Envisioning how it could work

Finally, participants spontaneously shared thoughts on how they imagine the donation could work. By offering them a summary of their previous discussions, they were asked to think about their experience as donors, how they would like their belongings to be handled.

A participant, then made additional suggestions from the service provider point of view, mentioning transportation and distance.

"I just realize now that these kinds of initiatives are mainly managed by the church and religious organizations, especially outside of major cities, this is a little disturbing..." - Lorenzo

"It would be great to search for receivers, instead of just for needs. So that from a material exchange a more complex and fruitful relationship can generate. You can get involved, interact with them... I imagine it would mainly serve non lucrative organizations and if you already have this kind of mindset, the donation could really act as a springboard"
- Lorenzo

Donors/items to donate	Nicoletta	Ilaria	Lorenzo
Pots & pans	Offcampus students		
Hiking jacket/racing bike	Associations GAEP/CAI		
Porcelain dolls	Non-profit shop owner	Hospital (Alzheimer patients)	Youth center
Sofa			Self-managed uni cafes
Stove & oven			Youth center
Credenza & wardrobe	Offcampus students		
Mechanics tools	Amateur mechanic	Farmers	
Books		Church library	Penitentiaries
VHS cartoons		Kindergarten	
Seamstress tools		School creative labs	Artisan
Wicker baskets	Cats/dogs shelter	Non-profit florist	
Old sheets and blankets	Cats/dogs shelter		
Table cloths and dish towels		Church organisation	
Antique farming tools	Agrarian school		

Tab. 8 Summary of Preferred Receivers by participants

6.3.5 Synthesis & Insights

This workshop allowed to gather more detailed information regarding the potential receivers of belongings from participants, summarized in a table. Listening to people who experienced managing things in different contexts, a student at university sharing an apartment with roommates, a woman who was rushing to empty out her deceased uncle's apartment, and another who took her time to do so allowed to gather diverse points of views. Moreover, reflections on other types of donations, potential reactions, and functioning of the potential service where made.

- **Transparency** is needed to guarantee that belongings will not be used dishonestly;
- Some items, such as underwear, or really worn-down pillows are **deemed unsuitable** to donate to anyone;
- Donors who want to **contribute further** to a specific cause could have the chance to use the material donation to jumpstart a long-term relationship with the receiver, or to function as an intermediary with other donors;
- The **safety and energy efficiency** of old electronic appliances should be tested before giving them to others;
- Providing means to get in **contact with less easy-to-reach organizations** such as penitentiaries would be appreciated by those who want to help specific entities;
- Older people who are **skeptical** about meeting or letting strangers into their house would appreciate a mediated service.

6.4 From Insights to Concept Generation

6.4.1 Mind mapping

The insights and observations gathered from the two workshops allowed to go from having a comprehensive understanding of the personal and family items that will most likely be discarded, and unwanted in the future by the current 20 year-olds, to uncovering preferred material donations' receivers while discussing on the potential service offering.

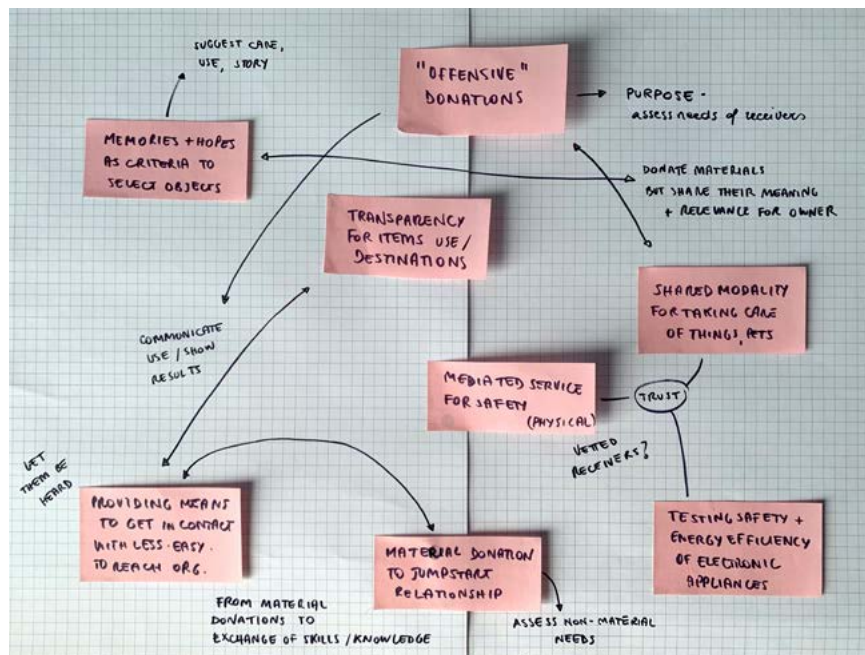


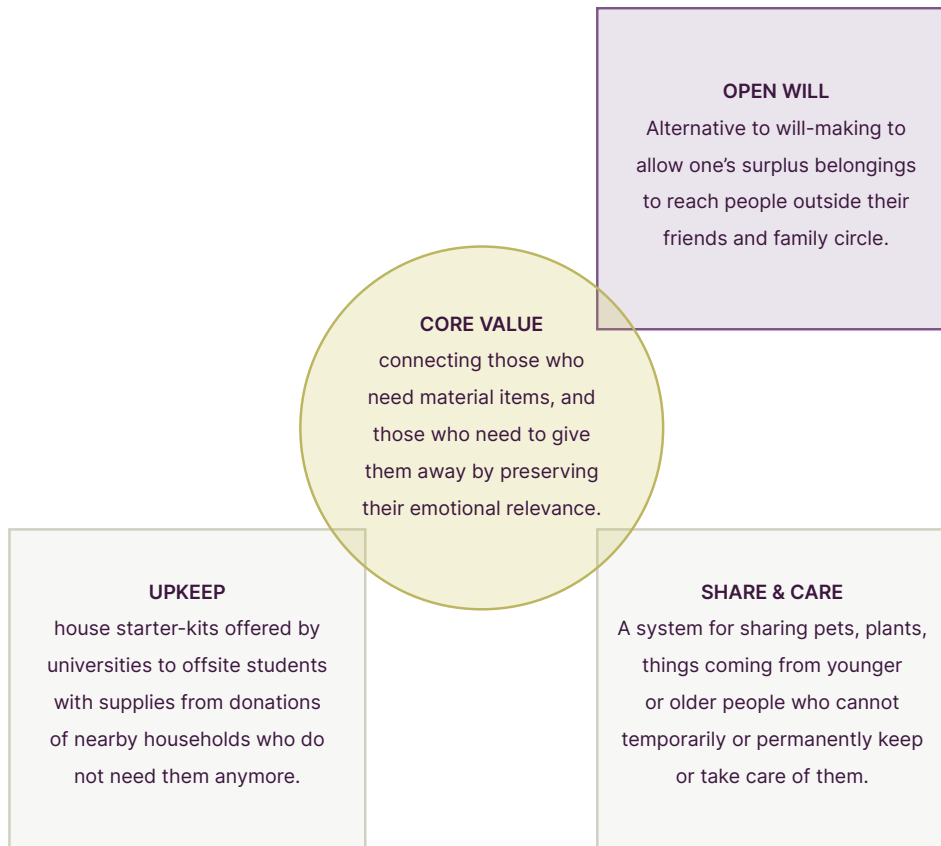
Fig. 46 Mindmap for Concept Generation

Some of the observations proposed by participants during the workshops have been elaborated to be pillars of the future upcoming proposal.

- Enabling **purposeful donations**, not offensive ones;
- Allowing donors to contribute with non-material donations, in form of **knowledge and skills**;
- Offering a **mediated service** to ensure effectiveness and safety;
- **Including a wider range of people** by offering multiple ways to give;

Both sessions revealed important for the progression of the thesis and allowed to conduct an individual brainstorming session. Brainstorming is an ideation method with the aim of elaborating more ideas possible in a determined timeframe. In this case it was a matter of identifying the potentialities behind participants' considerations and trying to elaborate value systems for users in forms of concepts, the seedlings of innovative solutions.

Considering the various practices investigated until this point of the research, the brainstorming activity was open to satisfying and enabling people in different contexts and moments of life. The three following concepts have been generated focused on specific practices.



Considering the research starting point, literature findings, themes, and co-design insights, the third concept, 'Open will', was selected. Preserving emotional relevance is, in fact, intrinsic to the practice of will-making. In the following chapter, an explanation for the choice is given, continuing with a development of the service system proposal.

7 Concept Development

The final step of the design process entailed understanding the basics of will-making in Italy, the involved figures, and the current options to donate personal belongings. Relevant case studies were identified to gather learnings and better define the service system proposal illustrated in the second half through storyboards, and conceptual maps.



7.1 Will-making and Donations

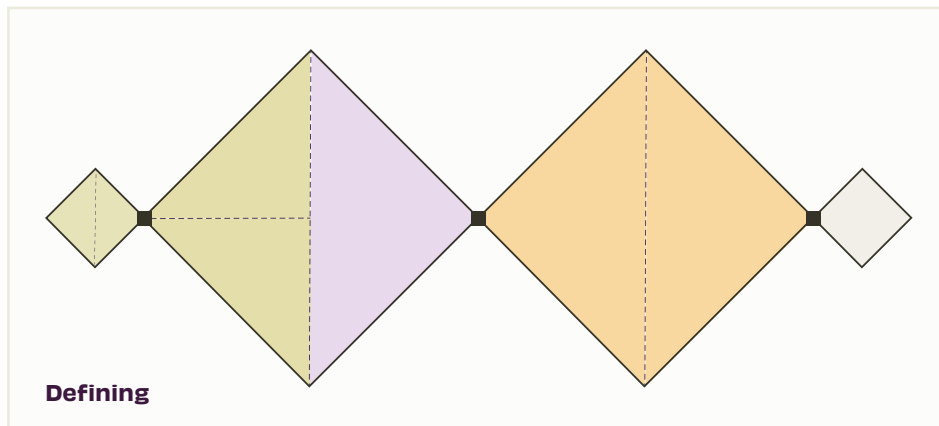
7.1.1 A promising Vision

Will-making is an engrained practice in most of the world. Its first evidence was retrieved from documents in ancient Greece and Rome, where only male individuals with no heirs could write a testament. The purpose of writing a will has remained the same through the years: helping to ease the burden of a loss on children and grandchildren and avoiding disputes with clarity and instructions. But significant factors are influencing the process of will-making and will continue to do so.

Unlike in ancient times, people have accumulated such vast amounts of material things that it makes it problematic for direct heirs to deal with what is left in such a delicate and overwhelming moment. As it emerged from Magnusson's book on death cleaning, preparing for the end-of-life by revisiting possessions is a responsibility one has towards their children and grandchildren. If anyone takes care of their belongings and puts effort into deciding what to do with them ahead of time, it eliminates a burden for them.

Moreover, the happening of vastly impacting events, such as the Pandemic has brought people to re-evaluate their relationships and consequently, their belongings from another point of view.

Finally, societal changes and the progressive evolution of family structures and customs will foreseeably lead to different ways of leaving personal belongings to others once passed away. Indeed, with a quickly aging population, it follows that patterns of family life have changed. Families are becoming multi-generational, meaning that more generations are alive at the same time and growing older. Established couples and individuals already own main household furniture and accessories long before their grandparents die. Therefore, it can be imagined that the habit of passing down dining plate sets, appliances, and furniture to the younger generation as a gift will slowly fade away. Similarly, society and we, as the younger generations, will be called to make a progressive transition in our relationship to material objects, as overconsumption will continue to impact our surroundings negatively.



The primary evidence of this thesis work lies in the fact that material belongings are a powerful means for mediating and negotiating relationships, and anything one decides to do with things entails a complex process of considering, organizing, reviewing, and at times departing from certain social and kinship ties.

Thinking about a service system that enables people to imagine new directions for the things their children will not have a chance to keep might represent a solution for those imminent challenges. The practice of passing things down from a generation to another is, yes, a material gift, but more importantly, a wish for the future of receivers.

As Mauss stated, gifting is much more emotionally relevant than receiving, for that one puts part of themselves in a gift and has, in turn, an emotional comeback. Donating to those who need unwanted belongings would allow people to see the emotional value of things and keep it alive for mediating relationships for others while developing an inevitable social tie to them.

Gifts create connections, and voluntarily or not, donating items one has lived with for 5, 10, 30, or 60 years to strangers, even far away, generates relationships and continuous social exchanges between people, the original owners, and new ones.



Fig. 47 Tea set, Nicoletta Bellani (research participant), 2021

7.1.2 Regulatory Laws & Involved Figures

The following paragraphs provide an understanding of current rules and practices regarding will-making. Different countries present different laws and exceptions for what regards will-making. In the case of this thesis, the Italian legislation is taken into consideration.

“A will is a revocable document with which any person, fit to plead, can make decisions on how his estate will be managed and distributed until the moment of death. For the Italian law, three different types of wills exist: handwritten, notarised (through a notary deed with two witnesses present), and secret. If the will adversely affects the rights of a legal heir, he/she might take legal action to contest all or part of it. Then it is fundamental, to turn to a notary to reach one’s goal, in respect of the law and to avoid future contentious relationships among heirs.” (Consiglio Nazionale del Notariato, n.d.) – translation by the author

A will allows to name who is going to benefit from parts of someone’s estate. In absence of a will, after the death of a person, the law will regulate the partition of assets and belongings to family members in various measures. The Italian law protects legitimate heirs, descendants (children and grandchildren), and ascendants (parents, grandparents...), and the spouse by setting aside a part of the estate even against the wishes expressed in the will.

Keeping a will up to date is fundamental to ensure its validity through time. After major life events, such as marriage, divorce, and the death of beneficiaries it is necessary to review modify wishes taking into consideration other people. According to the presence or absence of legitimate heirs at the moment of death, it is then calculated what their dedicated part of estate is, and what is available for the will-maker to give freely to whom they might desire. Therefore, there is a limit to the freedom of making a will in Italy. (Consiglio Nazionale del Notariato, n.d.)

In the light of the consequences brought by the Pandemic, unfitness to plead in case of serious illness and sudden death, the Italian law allows to draft a ‘special will’, which is valid in case of epidemics, and highly contagious diseases. The process to draft a special will is simplified, as it can be received by others such as a major, priest, and witnessed by minors. The limit of this special form of will is its period of validity, three months. (Politelli, 2020)

7.1.3 Material and Non-material Donations

A notary or solicitor is the authority who is traditionally associated with the act of making a will and guaranteeing its effectiveness. Involving a notary for the drafting of a will is not obligatory. However, it might be necessary when assets are multiple or particularly complex to handle. A handwritten will that is dated and signed is equally legal. After the person's death, notaries play the crucial role of signing the will to make it effective and proceed with the succession eventually. If the will is drafted 'publicly' by a notary, two witnesses must be present and acknowledge what has been decided in the process. When a person owns a large number of assets, or their subdivision is particularly complex to make, some decide to choose and nominate an executor or more. They can be anyone in the family, a friend, a notary, an accountant, or even a bank. Executors have the responsibility to verify all wishes are followed and manage any issue that might arise regarding the subdivision of assets after the passing away of the person.

Frequently, donations within family members are in the form of real estate, which gets passed down from one generation to another, even in case the will-maker is still alive (usufruct). Donations to legitimate heirs is considered an anticipated form of legacy. Donations towards charities and non-profits, for the Italian law, are drawn from the available part of estate left after calculating the part that legitimate heirs have the right to inherit. It has been reported how, with the lasting of Pandemic, the inclination to donate to charitable causes when drafting a will has grown. With a survey, "Italians and solidarity after Coronavirus" by Walden Lab, for the Comitato Testamento Solidale, made up of 22 nonprofit organizations, it emerged that 20% of over-50 years old have or want to donate part of their estate to charities. Experts state that it is a positive sign that might be due to the sensitizing and awareness campaigns on the topic, but it is also connected to the sensitivity that people have developed with the spread of the Pandemic. People have recognized the role and importance of nonprofit organizations in dealing with hardships, and the impact that donations make on the future of 'others'. (Consiglio Nazionale del Notariato, 2020)

Testamentosolidale.org is an informational website by the aforementioned committee, which aims at promoting the culture of leaving donations to charities. They do so, through an exhaustive panoramic on the

projects and initiatives of non-profits, and involving notaries, as experts that respond to any doubt that might arise on the topic. In particular, the website focuses on explaining what the available part of estate (quota disponibile) is, underlining that making a donation for solidarity does not damage legitimate heirs' inheritance. In most cases, including charities and non-profit organizations in a will coincides with donating financial assets, as this is the quickest and less time-consuming way of contributing to a cause. Cash, stocks, bonds, life insurance policies and retirement accounts are accepted by most charities. However, for what regards material donations, only items with a relevant monetary value are considered, such as real estate, vehicles, jewellery, artwork, and valuable furniture pieces.

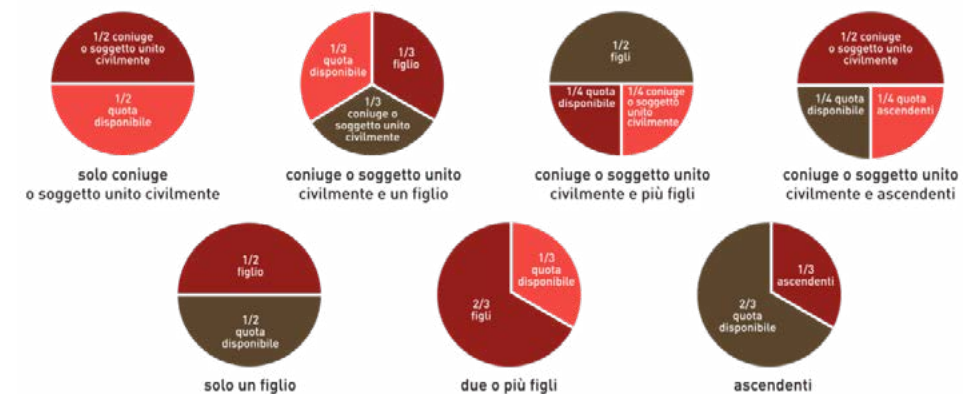


Fig. 48 "Quota Disponibile" visualization, Testamentosolidale.org, 2019

7.1.4 Case Studies Review

After having gathered information about the will-making process, and the current available options to donate at the end of one's life, a case study research and selection was made. The goal was to understand what the opportunities for donating material items were and get a glimpse of the experience for donors and receivers. Services offering the possibility to make Non-material donations were included, as the field has been growing with variegated options to ensure transparency, and practicality. Those could, indeed, present opportunities for defining the new service handling material donations.

01 Farewill

Farewill is a U.K. online will-writing service, offering a fast and cost-effective way of leaving assets to others. The process is guided through a series of questions to answer either on a digital device (90£), or on the phone to an operator for a higher fare (120£). Experts check out the document and approve it within 5 days. Then the will needs to be printed and signed in front of at least two witnesses, to make it legally binding. To update the will, the service asks for 10£ a year.

- **Type of Donation**

Non-material, monetary

- **Available for donors and charities in**

The U.K.

- **Core Value**

Fast and convenient, accessible will-writing with dedicated customer service.

- **Offered Services**

Guided will-writing online or on the phone, Funeral arrangements, Probation

02 Givewell

Givewell is an independent non-profit focused on helping people do as much good as possible with their donations. They recommend a short list of top charities, annually updated, working in global health and poverty alleviation selected through their in-depth research process, through studies, on-field visits, interviews to staff members, and spending reviews. An impact calculator tool is offered to have a quantifiable idea of the results of a donation.

- **Type of Donation**

Non-material, Monetary

- **Available for donors in**

The U.S.

- **for charities in**

Low-income countries

- **Core Value**

Giving effectively, maximizing the value of every dollar donated by directing it towards where it will help the most with no intermediary fees.

- **Offered Services**

Short list of top charities, Open-source research data
Cost-effectiveness analyses, Impact calculator tool

03 Furniture Banks

Furniture Banks is a registered charity and social enterprise which redistributes gently used furniture and housewares from donors in the community to families and individuals experiencing furniture poverty. Revenues generated through the furniture removal service fund charitable activities as they give a helping hand to get back on their feet and regain stability. To be eligible to request for furniture, one cannot ask directly, but must be referred by partners/social service agencies.

- **Type of Donation**

Material, Furniture, chairs, tables, sofas, dressers, and housewares

- **Available for donors and receivers in**

Northern U.S., Canada

- **Core Value**

Collecting lightly used furniture and finding it a new purpose in 72 hours to provide the most vulnerable individuals and families in society the means to create a true home.

- **Offered Services**

Furniture Bank Directory, Furniture pick-up

04 Global Giving

Global Giving is a non-profit that makes it easy and safe to give to projects anywhere in the world, while providing local organizations the tools, training, and support they need to thrive.

- **Type of Donation**

Non-material, monetary

- **Available for donors and receivers**

Globally

- **Core Value**

User friendly and easy way to contribute with a monetary donation in remote parts of the world.

- **Offered Services**

Vast array of potential receivers to choose from, pictures and progress of supported causes

05 Habitat ReStores

Habitat Restores are home improvement stores that accept small and large donations of new or gently used furniture, appliances, housewares, building materials and more. Proceeds from the sales of these items help Habitat's work in your community and around the world.

- **Type of Donation**

Material, furniture, construction material

- **Available for donors and receivers in**

The U.S.

- **Core Value**

Divert hundreds of tons from citizens and landfills each year, accepting hard-to-dispose-of items including new and used furniture, appliances and surplus building materials to sell and help the poor build foundations for the future.

- **Offered Services**

Drop down spots locator, Schedule pickup, Volunteering programs

06 Green Drop

Green Drop home clean-out service helps to re-purpose and donate large volumes of belongings that are no longer needed or wanted and convert them into funds for three local partner charities. A trained concierge is sent out for consultation on the items they can accept and help prepare for drivers who pack, and remove the donation. The service is targeted towards people Preparing to Move, Downsizing, Transition into Assisted Living Facilities, Death in the Family, Estate Sales.

- **Type of Donation**

Material – household items, furniture, clothing, shoes, blankets and bedding, collectibles, kitchenware, toys, small appliances, electronics, and sporting goods.

- **Available for donors & charities in**

Eastern U.S.

- **Core Value**

Make a charitable donation and a difference for the environment by extending the life of unwanted items to individuals in need for free.

- **Offered Services**

Drop-off locations, Free home pick-up, Tax receipt

07 Give Directly

Give Directly is a global NGO specialized in delivering digital cash transfers, working in challenging contexts across 8 countries. It allows donors to send money directly to the world's poorest as people living in poverty deserve the dignity to choose for themselves how best to improve their lives and cash enables that choice. They use rigorous experimental research (randomized controlled trials) to measure the impact and answer public policy questions.

- **Type of Donation**

Non-material, monetary

- **Available for donors**

Globally

- **For charities**

Africa, the U.S.

- **Core Value**

Donating cash directly to people living in poverty and gathering feedback by launching experimental evaluations (Randomized Control Trials) with independent researchers documenting the impacts on recipients and on the local economy.

- **Offered Services**

Direct digital cash donations, Cash Research Explorer, Open-Source Research papers, Programs' overview and status

08 Humana

Humana collects clothing and household textiles that get separated to be repurposed in Africa, sold in dedicated stores to raise money, to be recycled, and in some cases discarded.

• Type of Donation

Material, clothing items, shoes, backpacks, accessories, textiles

• Available for donors and receivers in

Europe and the U.S.

• Core Value

Maximize the social value of a clothing item by supporting charity projects in Africa through the collection of unwanted clothing and household textiles.

• Offered Services

Resell shops

09 Will Aid

Will Aid works as a special partnership between the legal profession and nine of the UK's best-loved charities, such as ActionAid, Age UK, British Red Cross. It is an annual event, where for a whole month, professional solicitors draw up a basic will without charging their fee, instead they invite their clients to donate a suggested £100 to raise vital funds for partner charities, while ensuring that people in the UK gain the reassurance of knowing they have a professionally written Will.

• Type of Donation

Non-material, monetary

• Available for donors and charities in

The U.K.

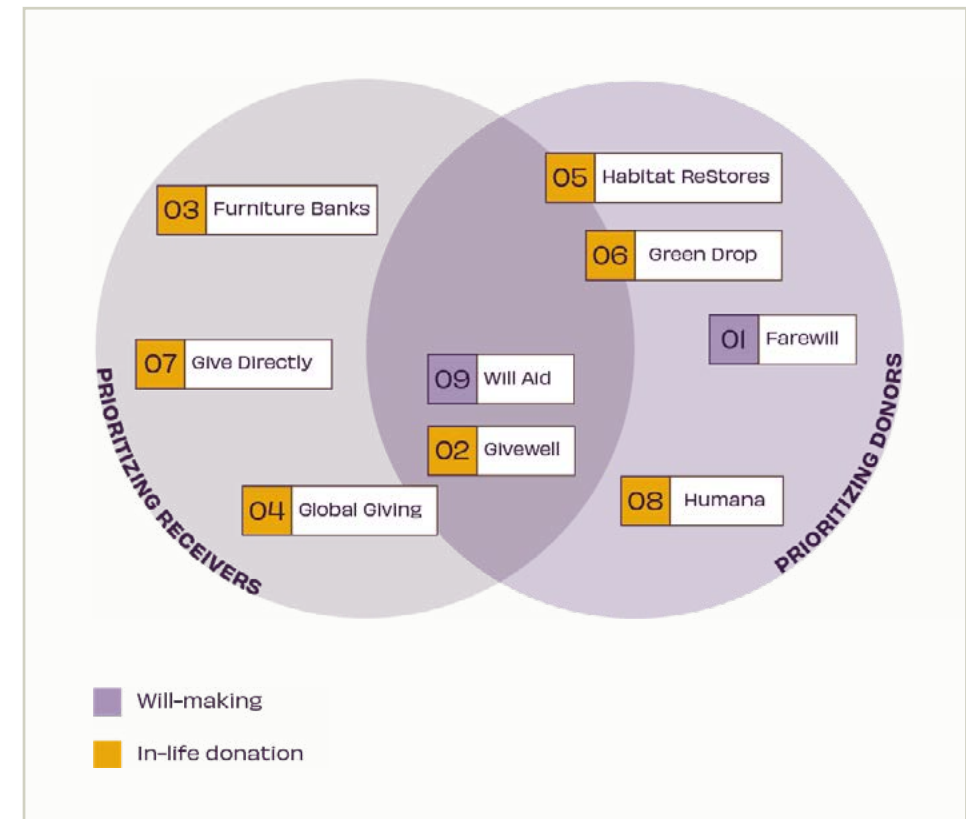
• Core Value

Everyone benefits, having a professionally drawn-up will for free and directing the unspent towards charities for their vital work.

• Offered Services

Charities' profiles and impact, annual will-making, solicitor locator

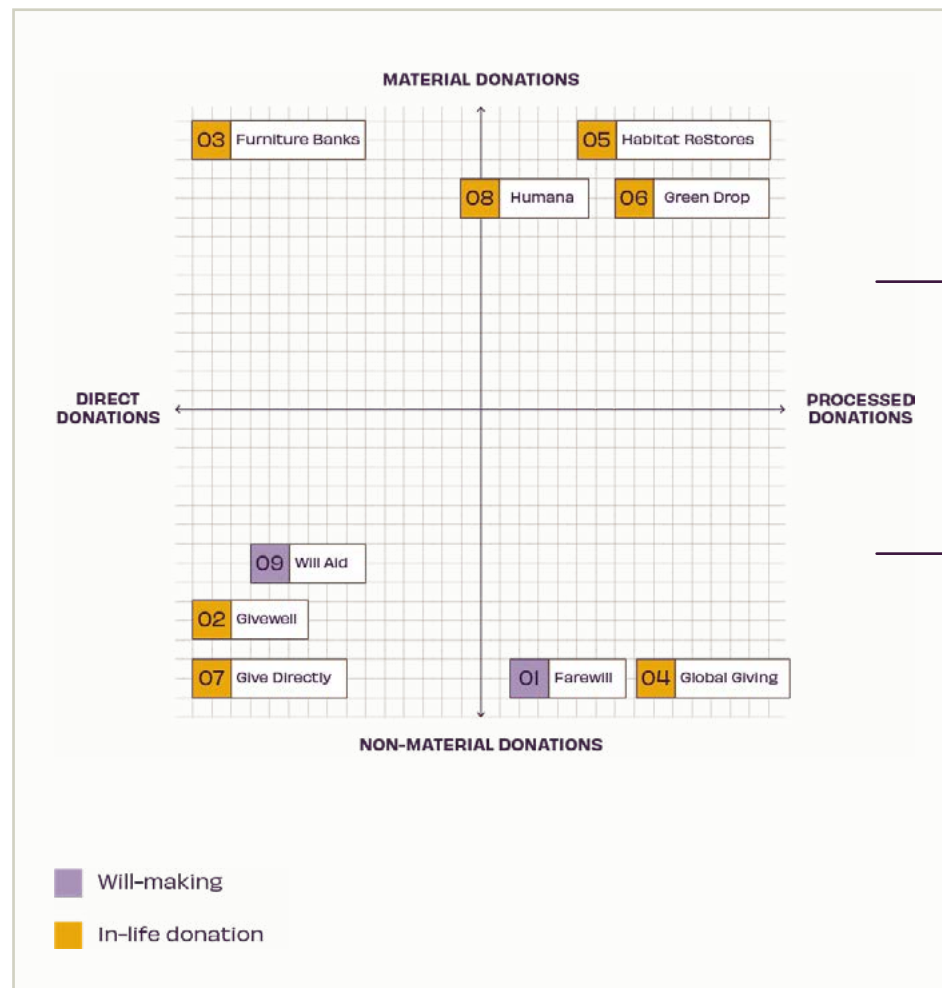
A Venn diagram was used to start the case studies analysis. It showcases the subdivision between those services that prioritize the receiver's needs and requests and those whose primary aim is to satisfy the donor.



From the donors' point of view:

- Evidence and research-based services, which also share data instill most trust. (Give Directly, Give Well)
- Providing visual proof and telling the stories of people who received donations and put them to good use allows building awareness and connections between donors and receivers'. (Give Well, Global Giving)
- Offering a hassle-free pick-up service is a distinctive feature when dealing with loss and emotional challenges. (Green Drop)
- Donating locally might provide not as big of an impact as when donations are received in lower-income countries. (Give Well)

Through a positioning map, case studies have been placed in relation to the type of donation they enable, material or non-material, and the type of exchange happening between service provider and receiver.



Material donations from the analyzed case studies primarily consist of house furniture, accessories, clothing, and estates. Case study 03 stands out as it clearly states how second-hand donated furniture goes directly to families in need. The same happens in case study 06, which is tightly affiliated with local associations. While case study 05, in the processed donations area, focuses on reselling household accessories, furniture, appliances, and building materials to donate to causes in need. Similarly, case study 08 sells most of their clothing donations in Western countries and donates earnings to those in need in the South of the world.

Non-material donations from the showcased case studies consist of monetary contributions. Indeed, it has been argued that financing causes is the only way they have to obtain what they need and of higher quality. Of those focusing on non-material donations, it has been found how some organizations are built on efficiency and directedness. Case studies 02 and 07 are placed on direct contributions end of the spectrum as they dedicate their effort to making the most out of donations by directly giving money to vetted causes with no fees. While case study 04, closer to 'processed donations', belongs to the broad range of similar services, which ask for a 5-12% fee on donations for running operations.

7.1.5 Final Considerations & Design Guidelines

Understanding current will-making regulations, donations and reviewing innovative case studies led to formulate a few considerations, which then shaped the service proposal.

1 Not a legally-binding will

Making a legally binding will entails several steps, making it complex and cold, especially considering the emotional burden that people feel at that moment.

As the service proposal aims at supporting end-of-life donations, it should not be complicated nor stressful. Therefore, it will be conceived as an informal way of leaving a material legacy, with the possibility to update, modify and revoke choices. The role of the executor will be maintained, inviting the will-maker to nominate one or more with the same function as in traditional will-making.

2 Taking off the burden

To today, donating material assets is only possible when they have a relevant economic value according to the receiver. Items are accepted to be sold and converted into credit. Children and grandchildren dealing with the consequences of the death of a parent or close relative are overwhelmed with grief when they might find themselves reviewing and having to move things from a place to another. Allowing the will-maker to evaluate most belongings before passing away and foresee the role of children and grandchildren to coordinate with their wishes will save them the emotional burden of making complex decisions afterward.

3 Purposeful and Regulated material Donations

It has been argued how monetary donations should be preferred when wanting to support causes in life or at the end-of-life, as the possibility to make digital transfers entails fewer costs and efforts by non-profits in respect to sending off material items. Second-hand clothes have been exported to Africa, specifically to Ghana, for decades, where they have become known as ‘Obroni W’awu’, in Akan ‘dead white man’s clothes. The country flourished with second-hand markets for 50 years, but the currently imported amounts are unmanageable, and 40% percent of bails’ content is deemed unsellable. Clothes end up in unregulated landfills, only in some cases in ‘engineered’ ones. Still, even then, the capacity is not sufficient to process them, and they are left to decay, generating toxins and methane polluting the air, soil, and waters. (Davies, 2020)

Western countries continuously and intensely ‘download’ amounts of goods for daily use from manufacturing nations, but the same exceptionally happens for them on our part; when it happens, it is marked as charity. But doing charity should not mean dumping unusable piles of low-quality clothing there. Unregulated and untargeted exports damage the ecosystem and working conditions in receivers’ countries. Only exporting intact, usable material items should be a priority, as well as assessing the needs and requests of people before approving the transfer. Moreover, further regulations would prevent or, at least, discourage re-sell activities and speculation.



Fig. 49 Waste Pickers in Kpone, Ghana, 2020

4 Donations for long-term needs/goals

Another point to consider is the kind of donation intended. Unsolicited material donations sent to Port-au-Prince after the Haiti 2010 earthquake began spoiling, after not being redeemed because more critical relief supplies were needed at that moment. Unsolicited material donations not only clog supply chains and take up valuable space, but they also become a burden if not handled soon enough, transforming into health hazards for communities. (Center for International Disaster Information, n.d.)

The service proposal would not aim at donating material items in emergency or disaster relief contexts. Instead, it would provide people in need with the material means to achieve more long-term goals. For example, people who aim to become entrepreneurs but lack the resources and access to them, those who need to get settled into a house, or non-profit organizations requiring more supplies to keep up their work would be the ideal users.



Fig. 50 Unsolicited Donation, Haiti, Center for International Disaster Information, 2010

6 Accessibility for donors and receivers

Sending out requests for needs currently happens through foundations, which, operating in local communities, understand the context and function as support hubs for people.

The service proposal would be organized in a way that peer-to-peer requests can be made through a platform, allowing people to forward requests. But considering the lack of digital technological devices in low-income countries, it would also allow people to rely on local partner foundations to transfer their demands with technological devices. A similar consideration has been made for donors. Those who want to create a will but do not have access to digital devices or are not digitally literate and lack support from relatives or caregivers would carry out the process through a dedicated phone line.

7.2 Defining the service

7.2.1 Service Overview & Aim

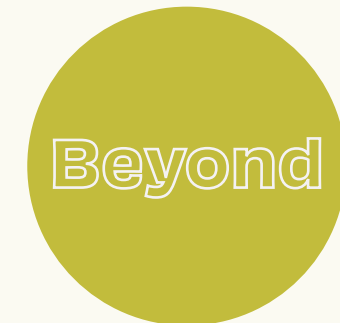
- Beyond invites those who are approaching the later years of life to reflect on the value of their belongings, furniture, décor, tokens, and to anticipate whom, among children, grandchildren, and other relatives or friends, will have an executory role for passing them down to Beyond's receivers.

- Similarly, those who have been decluttering and finding unwanted items might consider handing them down and contributing to helping someone with a specific need.

The term 'Beyond' has been chosen to refer to the core value of the system, the idea that unwanted items have functioned as relationship enablers for their former owner, and they can keep on doing so in the future, generating a tie between donor and receiver, and receiver and others. Beyond has also been chosen as it pairs well with other words to communicate how the system is articulated.



A platform-based service system to pass down material belongings in form of curated bundles to young entrepreneurs and non-profit organizations in developing countries.

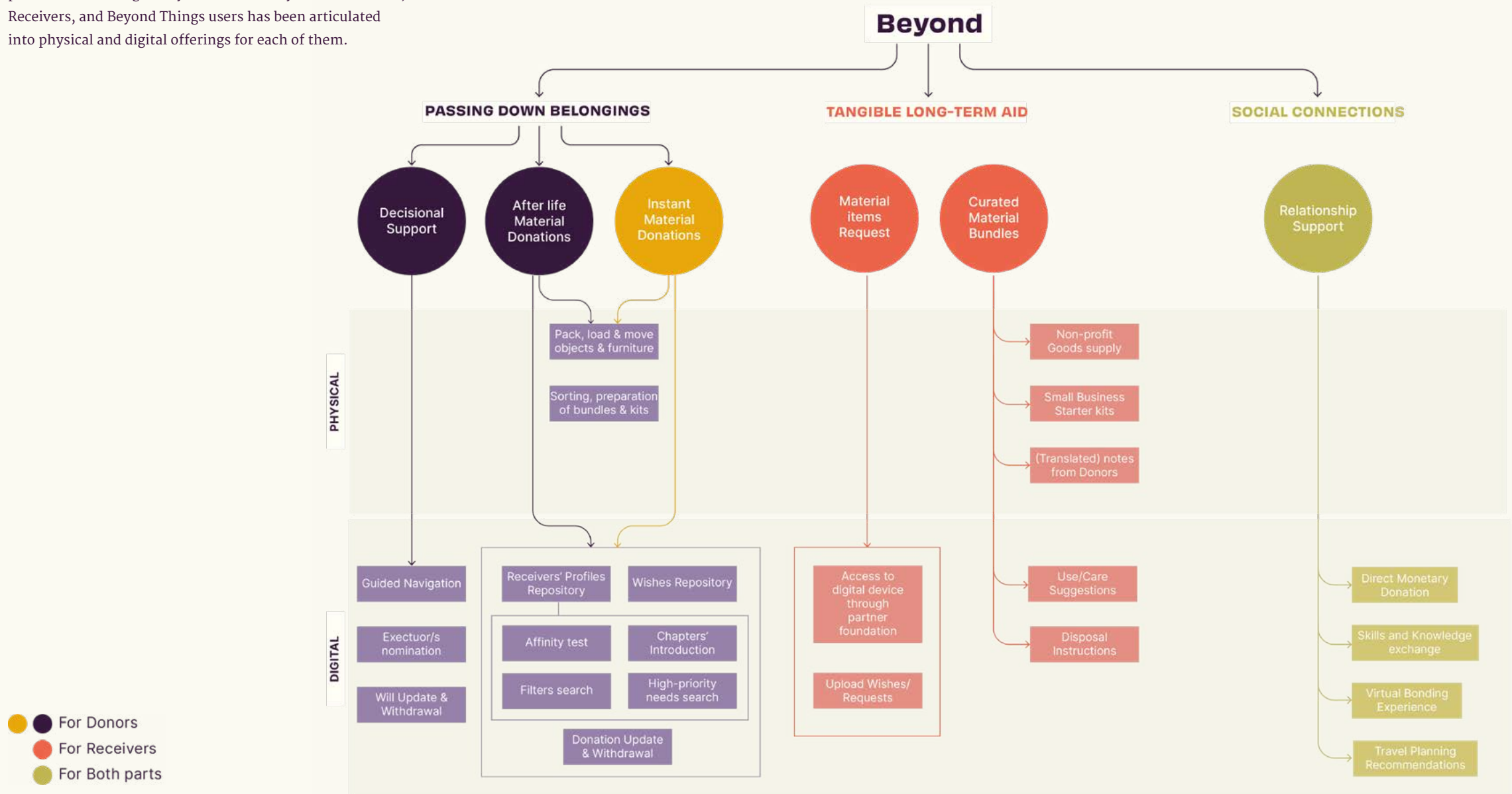


The aim is to generate an exchange network based on material items that fosters social ties by connecting people who need to give away owned or inherited belongings and those who need tangible support for jumpstarting their business or maintaining a non-profit running in low- and middle-income countries.



Service Offering

The service offering has been visualized through a dedicated map showcasing the passing down of belongings, tangible long-term aid, and social connections as three fundamental pillars. The offering to Beyond Life and Beyond Now donors, Receivers, and Beyond Things users has been articulated into physical and digital offerings for each of them.



Service Offering

Beyond Life

Beyond life

Is specifically tailored to those who want to make a **non-legally binding** will to re-direct material objects and furniture towards developing countries, with personalized support. As it might be possible that a long time passes before the donation happens (after the donor passes away), donors can only select the type of receivers, it will then be the responsibility of the **nominated executor**, to verify wishes are followed, and to complete the donation.

Beyond Now

Beyond Now

Is catered to those who wish to donate material objects and furniture **as soon as possible**. Donors can select receivers by filtering by type or cause, and respond to wishes/needs by filtering by items category.

Beyond Things

Beyond Things

Is a service extension providing **supported communication** channel for donors and receivers who express the desire to get in contact and start an **intangible exchange**, after a donation and with the service approval.

Dedicated functions and interactions on the platform allow the two parties to set up virtual meeting dates, and eventually, travel suggestions are given as support to plan a trip where the receivers of one's belongings are located.

User Types

Lucia, 85 Beyond Life donor

She has been downsizing with the help of her daughter to move to a smaller apartment after the death of her husband. Her heart breaks knowing that many things she has lived with all her life won't stay with her anymore. She has a passion for cooking and collected several traditional recipe books through the years, noting her daughters' favorites. Of course, she will cherish her personal notebook for her daughter, but she cannot keep the rest.

What she plans to give away

- Sets of dining plates and glasses received through the years
- Piles of traditional recipe cookbooks
- Dining table

Nicoletta, 55, Lucia's Executor

As Lucia's daughter, she has been working towards decluttering, downsizing and giving away things from her mother's house. She is overwhelmed by the quantity of things to deal with and emotionally anxious as her mother has been feeling sad. She spends weeks selecting things for her mother to keep, those she wants to preserve for her daughters, friends and family, but

Lorenzo, 25, Beyond Now and Beyond Things donor

He has been decluttering his childhood bedroom, to prepare it for a small renovation. He got to know the service from university, and deeply shares the values of Beyond. He would like to help in penitentiaries but he does not really know how to get in contact with them. Schools are also an important cause to him and he is always looking for ways to contribute.

What he plans to give away

- English, French Books
- Office clothing
- English and French Language skills

Kofi, 23, Beyond receiver

He is a young worker from Djibouti, who has been dreaming to open up a restaurant and fulfilling his passion for Italian Food. He has a plan for how to make it happen but does not have the funds yet. When he gets to know Beyond from a local foundation, he sees it as the perfect opportunity to finally go forward with it.

What he wishes for

- Plates, glasses
- Chairs, tables
- Wall decor pieces

Beyond
Life

Nicoletta & Lucia's Experience



1 Lucia has been trying to process the fact that she will soon move from the apartment she has been living in for 53 years and will have to downsize her belongings.



2 For her it's difficult to imagine what her life will look like without those things that have marked some of her children's milestones while growing up, but her daughter and grandchildren already own everything, and do not have the space to store bulky furniture.



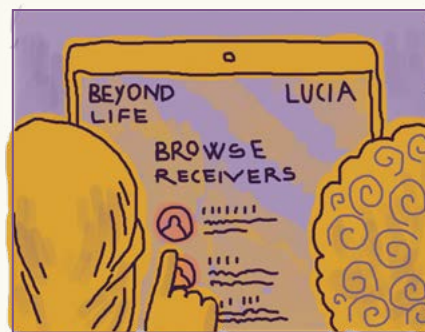
3 Her daughter, Nicoletta, is doing most of the work to help her move out, but is equally overwhelmed, as she is deeply tied to everything in that apartment and is anxious about such a drastic change in her mother's life.



4 Nicoletta gave some things away but the process seems never ending. A lot of plates, utensils, and cooking ware are left. While looking for help, she finds out about Beyond on a Facebook page and signs up her mother's profile and hers as executor in Beyond Life.



5 Lucia is excited to know that some of her things will have a new purpose, and spends time looking through some of the things she won't be able to bring to her smaller space. She remembers great moments flipping through cookbooks, finding bookmarks and handwritten notes, and looking at the set of dining plates they used for family dinners.



6 Lucia and Nicoletta take a look at the list of potential receivers. To have an idea of who might need their things, they select a category of items they want to donate - kitchen ware - and browse the results. As a Beyond Life donor Lucia chooses to help young entrepreneurs.



7 Kofi has been wanting to open up a restaurant, but has limited funds. After getting to know Beyond from a local foundation, he decides to upload a wish, describing himself, his aim, and needs - plates to serve food, glasses, chairs, and tables. After a phone interview with Beyond, his wish is approved.



8 After a few months, Lucia unfortunately passes away, and her daughter reviews her Beyond Life will as her executor to possibly modify and then confirm it. Her mother's previously selected wish had already been met, but she searches for a similar one, and finds Kofi's.

Beyond
Life

Nicoletta & Lucia's Experience



9 She selects the items and quantity she has available to help him. Then she reads instructions, uploads pictures of the items, and answers to some questions to describe them. She decides to include a note telling how meaningful those objects had been to her and her mother.



10 In a few days she receives an email that her donation was approved from Beyond and selects a pickup date from the available calendar. She is relieved that she finally found a way to deal with the remaining things and they will get to someone who needs them.



11 Movers get to the address, pack up things according to their schedule and bring them to Beyond's storage facility, where an employee will take care of preparing Kofi's starter kit for his restaurant by putting together Lucia's things and the rest from different donors.



12 Kofi receives the starter kit through a partner foundation operating near his village. He reads some of the translated notes included by donors and is excited to jumpstart his restaurant with things inherited from different people.



Nicoletta & Lucia's Experience

									After 8 months Lucia passes away
PHASE	PRE			DURING					
TASK/STEP	Nicoletta is helping her mother downsize for moving and needs to give away the things she has grown up with.	She sees an adv from Beyond on Facebook while looking for a second hand shop that could take some of their things.	Lucia is informed about the service, and spends some time reviewing her belongings that could go to someone who will use them.	They sign up and set up Lucia's profile and she nominates her daughter as executor.	They scroll through potential receivers	They select the category of items they want to give away to filter most appropriate receivers.	Lucia choses the type of receiver for her future donation, a young entrepreneur	Lucia temporarily signs the will	Nicoletta access the platform to review the will and browses through young entrepreneurs' wishes.
THOUGHTS & FEELINGS	<i>"I'm overwhelmed and anxious for the big change in my mother's life, she won't be around all of her things anymore..."</i>								<i>"I'm responsible to make my mother's things go where she would have wanted..."</i>
DIGITAL TOUCHPOINTS & FUNCTIONS	Facebook Group			Beyond platform					
				Profile set up	List of receivers	Filters		Email	
DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES	Awareness campaign			Affinity Test to guide decision					



Nicoletta & Lucia's Experience

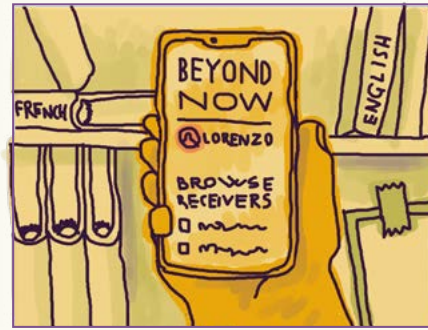
PHASE	DURING						POST		
TASK/STEP	She goes back to her mother's apartment and reconsiders what is left to give away. She filters young entrepreneurs by selecting the categories of things.	She sees Kofi's wish, and notices she can contribute to it by donating dining plates, glasses and a few wall decor pieces.	She specifies quantity and checks out a few boxes to describe items. She uploads pictures.	Receives approval from Beyond.	Selects pick up date from Beyond's moving calendar.	Movers arrive to the apartment, pack things up and bring them to Beyond's storage facility.	An employee reviews pending wishes for the Chapter and sorts donations to combine items and prepare complete packages for receivers.	Is informed that her packages arrived safely and have been appreciated by receivers.	
EMOTION									
THOUGHTS & FEELINGS			<i>"This looks like the best receiver for her beloved dining ware"</i>	<i>"I am so relieved I can finally empty out the apartment, it's been a hard time seeing all those things left..."</i>				<i>"I really hope to have contributed to someone's wish by donating my mother's belongings."</i>	
DIGITAL TOUCHPOINTS & FUNCTIONS	Beyond platform								Email
	Filters	Wish description	Donation upload	Email	BeyondCalendar	Moving Updates			

Beyond
NowBeyond
Things

Lorenzo's Experience



1 Lorenzo has been decluttering, and after giving things away to family members, and to Caritas, he realizes he does not know who to give his beloved books to as the local library does not accept them anymore because they are overflowing with donations.



2 On his uni Instagram page, he learns about Beyond Now, and decides to sign up. He already knows the causes he wants to contribute to: schools and penitentiaries. So, he selects a school in Algeria as the receiver of most of his books.



3 As he prepares his English and French reading books and uploads pictures and descriptions, he remembers his mother recently decluttered her wardrobe, and discarded a big pile of professional clothing items she used at the office.



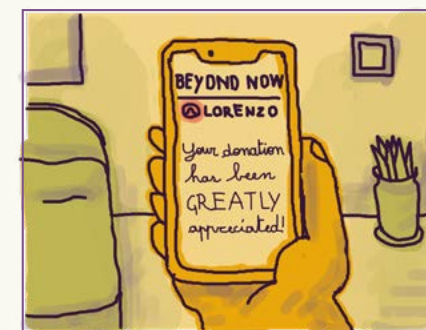
4 He browses for category and finds an Algerian non-profit organization which collects and puts together outfits for women going to their first job interviews. He completes his Beyond Now donation and waits for feedback.



5 He receives Beyond's approval for his book donations, except for a few clothing items that are considered too revealing. He takes those out of the pile, sets a pickup date and time, and prepares the packages.



6 On the set date the movers pick up the packages, and a few months later the school and women's association receive Lorenzo's donation, together with things from fifteen other donors.



7 Lorenzo receives a notification that his donations has been appreciated and put to use. As he is interested in contributing further, he reaches out to the school email address provided through **Beyond Things**, asking if they would need any kind of virtual help to enrich students' curricula.



8 He hears back from a teacher who invites him to speak English to students on a voluntary base three times a month. The time zones match and Lorenzo's schedule allows him to do so. They set a date to connect and begin a fruitful relationship.



Lorenzo's Experience

PHASE	PRE		DURING							
TASK/STEP	Lorenzo has been decluttering his room but books are not accepted by his local library anymore as they are overflowing with donations.	From his uni's Instagram page, he notices they advertised Beyond.	He checks out how Beyond works and immediately signs up for Beyond Now	Scrolls through the list of potential receivers, and filters by 'non-profits'	Selects a school in Algeria to help by donating his French and English books.	Reads instructions for uploading his donation	Takes pictures and describes his items	Remembers his mother recently decluttered her wardrobe and discarded office workwear.	Browses needs and filters by item category	Finds Algerian non-profit organization putting together outfits for women going to their first job interviews.
THOUGHTS & FEELINGS	<i>"I wish my beloved books could go to less fortunate people like those in penitentiaries...but I don't know how to reach them."</i>		<i>"I might include some other things to donate while I'm at it..."</i>							
DIGITAL TOUCHPOINTS & FUNCTIONS	Uni Instagram page		Beyond platform							
			Sign up	Receivers list and profile	Donation upload	Donation instructions		Filters	Receivers list and profile	
DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES	Awareness campaign						UploadInstructions	Suggesting similar wishes		



Lorenzo's Experience

PHASE	DURING				POST					
TASK/STEP	Uploads pictures and description and confirms donation.	Receives feedback from Beyond confirming, and suggesting to take out a few tops that might be considered too exposing.	Chooses pick up date and time from Beyond calendar.	Movers get to the address, verify the items match the donation and bring them to the facility.	Gets notified his packages have been shipped out for the North Africa Chapter.	Gets notified that the school and women association appreciated his donations.	Uses Beyond Things to contact the school and ask how he can contribute.	He is contacted by a teacher asking if he would like to contribute by speaking English to her students.	He accepts and they set a first meeting to get to know each other.	
THOUGHTS & FEELINGS						<i>"I would like to do something more for them..."</i>				
DIGITAL TOUCHPOINTS & FUNCTIONS	Beyond platform									
	Donation upload	Notification	BeyondCalendar		Notification			Email	Videocall platform	
DESIGN OPPORTUNITIES	Beyond Evaluaiton method	Guidelines for donations in countries of current chapter, customs/habits information						Give feedback of donated items in use		

7.2.2 How it works

The system map illustrates the flows of material and immaterial exchanges in-between actors and foresees the role of partners such as city municipalities and foundations for awareness and improvement of the service.

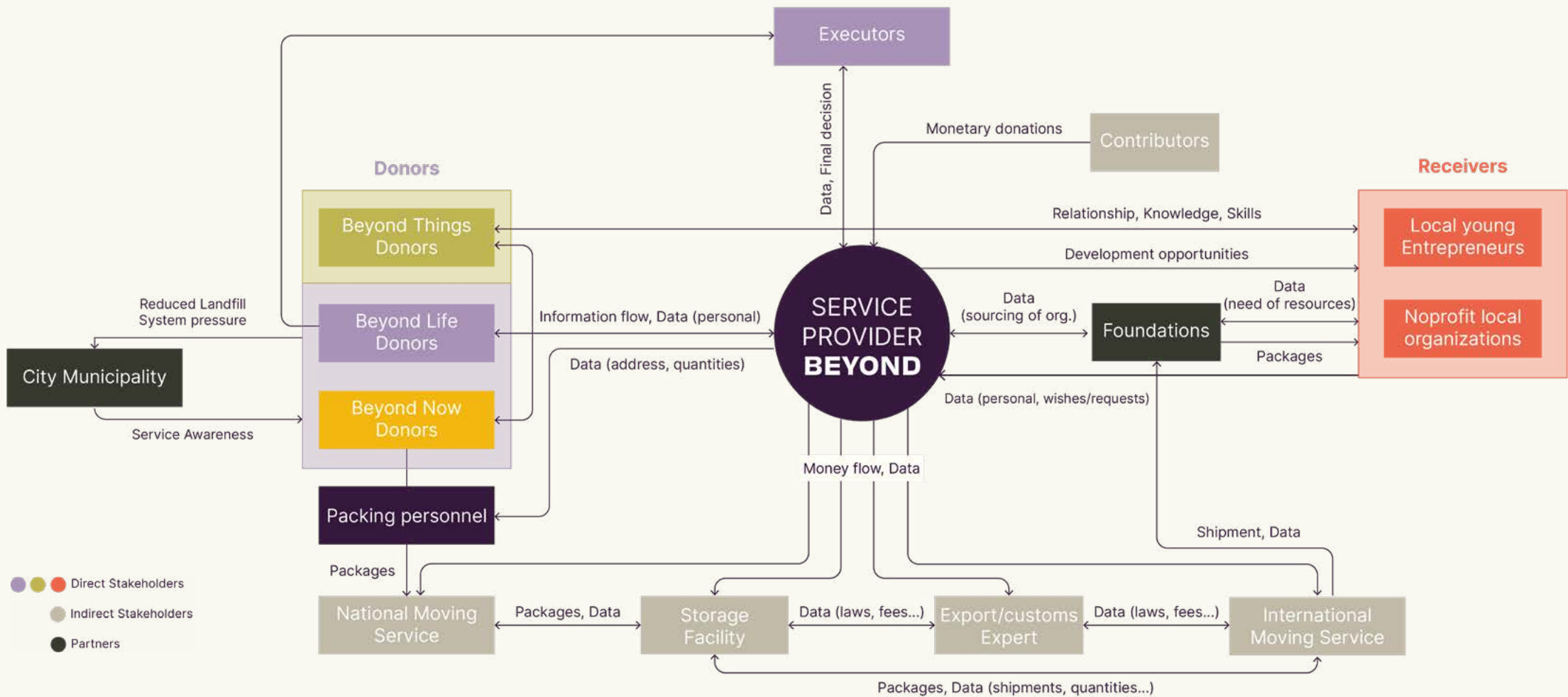
Potential Partners

Elea - Foundation for Ethics in Globalization

Exists to fight absolute poverty with entrepreneurial means, capitalizing on the benefits and opportunities of globalization.

Technoserve - Business Solutions to Poverty

Works with enterprising people in the developing world to build competitive farms, businesses, and industries.



7.2.3 A Sustainable Service System

Moving from the core value of the service proposal, which is linked to the emotional value of material items, more benefits that belong to the environmental, economic, and socio-ethical sustainability dimensions, elaborated by the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, can be identified. (United Nations, 2012)

It can be stated that Beyond is a Sustainable Service System as it aims at moving from a purely functional approach to a satisfaction approach based on innovative interactions between the stakeholders of the value production system (satisfaction system). (Vezzoli et al., 2021, 2) Moreover, the offer model is capable of delivering value “decoupling

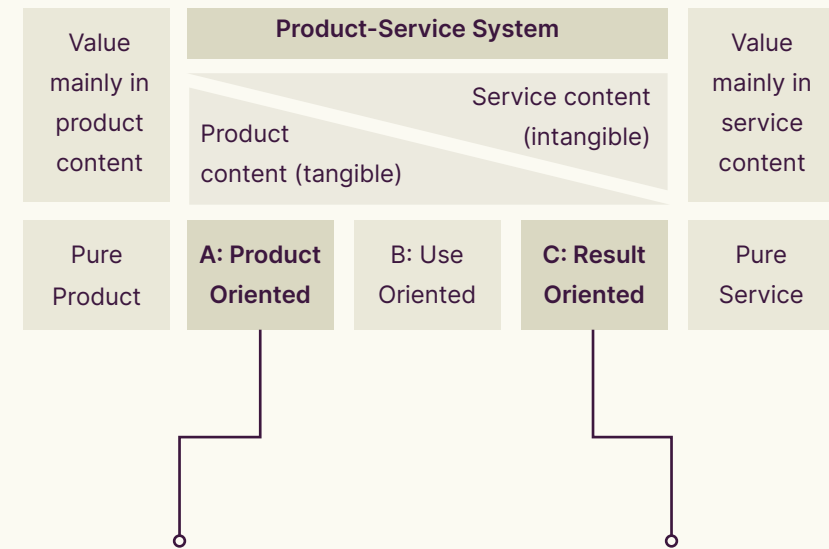
it from resource consumption and increase of negative environmental impact whilst extending access to good and services to low- and middle-income people and, at the same time, enhancing social equity and cohesion.” (Vezzoli et al., 2021, p.3)

Experts and theorists of Sustainable Service Systems have identified three main variables and, it can be stated the Beyond service proposal belongs to the Product and Result Oriented types of S.PSS. (UNEP. Division of Technology, 2009)



Fig. 52-54 SDGs Logos, United Nations, 2018

Fig. 51 PSS types to system innovation, UNEP. Division of Technology, 2009



- **Beyond Life and Now** provide the opportunity for unwanted and unneeded material items to be passed onto others, **extending their lifetime and intensifying the use** of the product.

- The service extension **Beyond Things** also favors the exchange of knowledge and skills through the platform. Considering the offering, its impact lies in creating new market opportunities and increased life quality for low- and middle-income communities. (Vezzoli et al., 2021)

- **Receivers** access to a set of functioning material items that are accurately chosen and curated to respond to a particular request, facilitating low- and middle-income people in jumpstarting their entrepreneurial activity and non-profits in providing relief to the most vulnerable parts of local communities.

- They also get **economic benefits**, as goods, and knowledge are transferred without any investment or cost initially, nor later.

The Sustainable Service System offer model is capable of delivering value “decoupling it from resource consumption and increase of negative environmental impact whilst extending access to good and services to low- and middle-income people and, at the same time, enhancing social equity and cohesion.”

(Vezzoli et al., 2021, p.3)

Considerations for Implementation

The impact of material items' transportation on the environment can be tackled from two points at the user experience level.

- **Information architecture to**

Showcase needs through 'chapters' to prioritize donations and emphasize that the shipment from a country towards another only happens when a vehicle is at its ideal capacity to optimize transport.

- **Logistics and transport optimization**

The display of organizations in need is primarily organized by area/region for logistic purposes. To contain operations, custom fees and to ensure that a container is fully loaded, organizations in determined countries could be prioritized in the list.

At the **user experience level**, this could result in nominating designated time periods as 'chapters', i.e. 'The North Africa Chapter'. Chapters for donators open 6 months prior to the shipping date.

- **Researching & Vetting Receivers**

In both cases, Beyond vets receivers with the partnership of local foundations which know and act in different parts of the world.

- **Encouraging Lower Carbon Emissions**

by **integrating design frictions** on the platform interface that drive people to choose to donate closer to their country.

- **Accessibility**

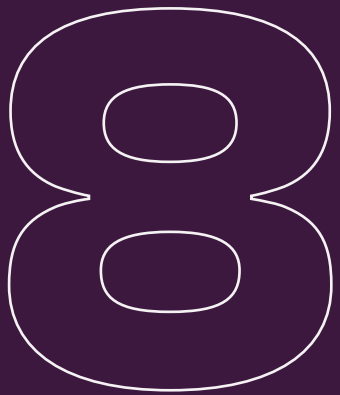
Nonprofit Organizations and young entrepreneurs can ask for a material donation either through a local foundation that is in contact with Beyond or do it directly on the platform.

- **Flexibility**

Users of Beyond Life might decide to switch to Beyond Now and donate before death. All users have the right to change their mind, update or withdraw the will/donation.

- The **approval** of material donations' requests is regulated by limitations on the frequency of requests, and amount of items required at a time.

Conclusions



Final Reflections

This thesis is characterized by being intrinsically generative and exploratory. It originated from an overview of the Italian context to understand how people responded to the spread of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Then, the concept of retrieving a sense control by managing material belongings in unsettling conditions became the primary focus of the research. Directly talking to people, in the primary exploratory research phase, enlarged the scope, and provided insight into the different practices in which people found themselves sorting through, repurposing, and discarding things. It was evident how many complex emotions went into taking a decision over a material item. Being responsible to tackle the mass of belongings left by a recently deceased relative or parent, made it even more challenging. Parting with an item one has grown up with, might feel like taking a step towards doing the same with the cultural and family values they have lived with.

The relevance of material items in shaping and mediating relationships should be enhanced and highlighted. The innovation brought by the current service proposal lays in proposing an alternative to the current materialistic options for giving away personal belongings.

The cardinal practice that shaped the service concept is will-making, and the preparation of personal items for the later years of life. However, a wider group of people has been considered, by enlarging the offering to all those people, who found themselves revisiting their possessions and deciding they no longer needed an item.

It is by leveraging on the intrinsic emotional value of personal and inherited items, and on the opportunity of gifting to continue a legacy, that Beyond aims to create a network. It connects those who need to give away unneeded material belongings, and those who need tangible support for maintaining a non-profit running or jumpstarting their business in low- and middle-income countries.

Future Developments

It is acknowledged how this research and service proposal have been designed from the point of view of someone born and raised in the Western part of the world which results limiting. The discrepancy between habits and customs that entail the use of certain items in two relatively close countries might be huge. For example, a full set of dining plates as we conceive them might seem unnecessary, or even unusable in other countries. Similarly, clothing items that we deem as office appropriate might not result appropriate at all in more conservative societies.

From the service implementation point of view, digging deeper, as in Miller's work, studying the relationships with objects in different parts of the world might would be fundamental for continuous improvements and development.

Indeed, a project of this nature should continue drawing from social sciences studies, first by establishing long lasting collaborations with anthropologists, ethnographers, and local foundations to ensure the success of material requests collection, and satisfaction. Dedicating time and effort to better get to know receivers and their needs could happen by integrating the work of social scientists and designers in field trips. The humanistic and flexible approach of design thinking would also positively contribute to the design of the platform interface for less digitally literate people, both in the donors' and receivers' groups.

From the service users' point of view, the cultural gap might be read as an opportunity to offer them learning material about other countries traditions and ways of relating to material items. Curating receivers' profiles and providing a test that matches a donor values with those of a non-profit or a young entrepreneur could be an innovative way of establishing connections.

Ultimately, more environmental conscious ways of transporting material items need to be investigated to limit emissions that come with transporting material things around the world.

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