

# **BRIDGING TEXTILES, PEOPLE, AND POSSIBILITIES**

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**Schroeder**

# Schroeder



Schroeder, also known by its full name **Schroeder van der Kolk**, was launched in 1923. Initially, the organisation aimed at integrating psychiatric patients into society through offering them work. But, after the Second World War and the introduction of the welfare state, the foundation's focus broadened and shifted to a **well-being and care foundation**. Currently, the foundation refers to itself as a 'human development company' in the region surrounding The Hague, Schroeder "wants to add value for its customers and the socio-economically vulnerable in our society in a socially responsible and sustainable manner" (Schroeder, 2023).

Schroeder's aspires to '**be strong together for people and product.**' It operates through six thrift stores and one central warehouse, and employs around 100 people. Through initiating reliable cooperation based on mutual trust, Schroeder **connects people and place in the neighborhood** (Schroeder, 2023).

Next to paid employees, Schroeder also relies on **volunteers** contributing to the day-to-day management of thrift stores, community centres, and work experience locations.

Schroeder focuses on three focus areas. These are;

- 1) In the neighborhood, close to the people,**
- 2) Preservation, restoration and development of skills, and personal qualities from its clients, and**
- 3) Sustainability.**

Schroeder's revenue model is partly based on consumers bringing in goods to **re-sell**. However, some of the materials that are delivered by consumers are too degraded, broken, or damaged to be re-sold. Schroeder is making use of the repair strategy from the **R-ladder** to still sell these products in its thrift stores and tries to upcycle products at the same time. Through advanced **sawing and processing equipment**, they are able to maintain the quality of a product, be it on a relatively small amount of products due to the amount of labour involved. The same goes for **reusing** elements of product for others. Schroeder is also able to **reuse textiles from discarded clothing items** to reuse it for bags, pillows, and fabric for repairing furniture. However, the **amounts of goods and especially textiles being donated to Schroeder, form a problem.**



One of Schroeder's  
thrift shops ↓

→ The corner where the  
clothes are sorted in a shop



Schroeder's  
logistics centre



→ Storage space in a shop





# Lack of Textile Sorting Capacities

Over the past month, we've collaborated closely with **Schroeder**, discussed with the head of operations, workers, managers, the municipality, and looked into reports. Our collaborative efforts aimed to articulate, understand, and explore the core problem of textiles, its causes, and consequences from the unique perspectives of the involved stakeholders (*see p. 8-10*).

**The Core Problem:** The heart of the issue? They're drowning in a sea of textiles without enough lifeguards. Imagine this: only 40% of donated clothing makes it to the thrift store shelves. So, the rest (60%) will be sold to third parties to be further recycled, processed, or discarded abroad. Why? Sorting capacity is like a crucial missing piece of a puzzle, costing Schroeder both revenue and efficiency.

Some **root causes** (*see tree map for details*):

- Staffing is scarce in a job market where the unemployment rate is low. As Schroeder hires people who are distant from the job market (low-skilled), they struggle to compete with other companies and cannot easily increase wages.

- The quantity of textile received - 10 thousand tonnes each year, and most of the time the quality is low.
- Being a non-profit organisation, they face some financial difficulties. Limited funds and high expenses (rent and labor costs) , hinder Schroeder's investment in sorting capacities

Some **consequences** (*see tree map*):  
What happens when sorting does not go as expected?

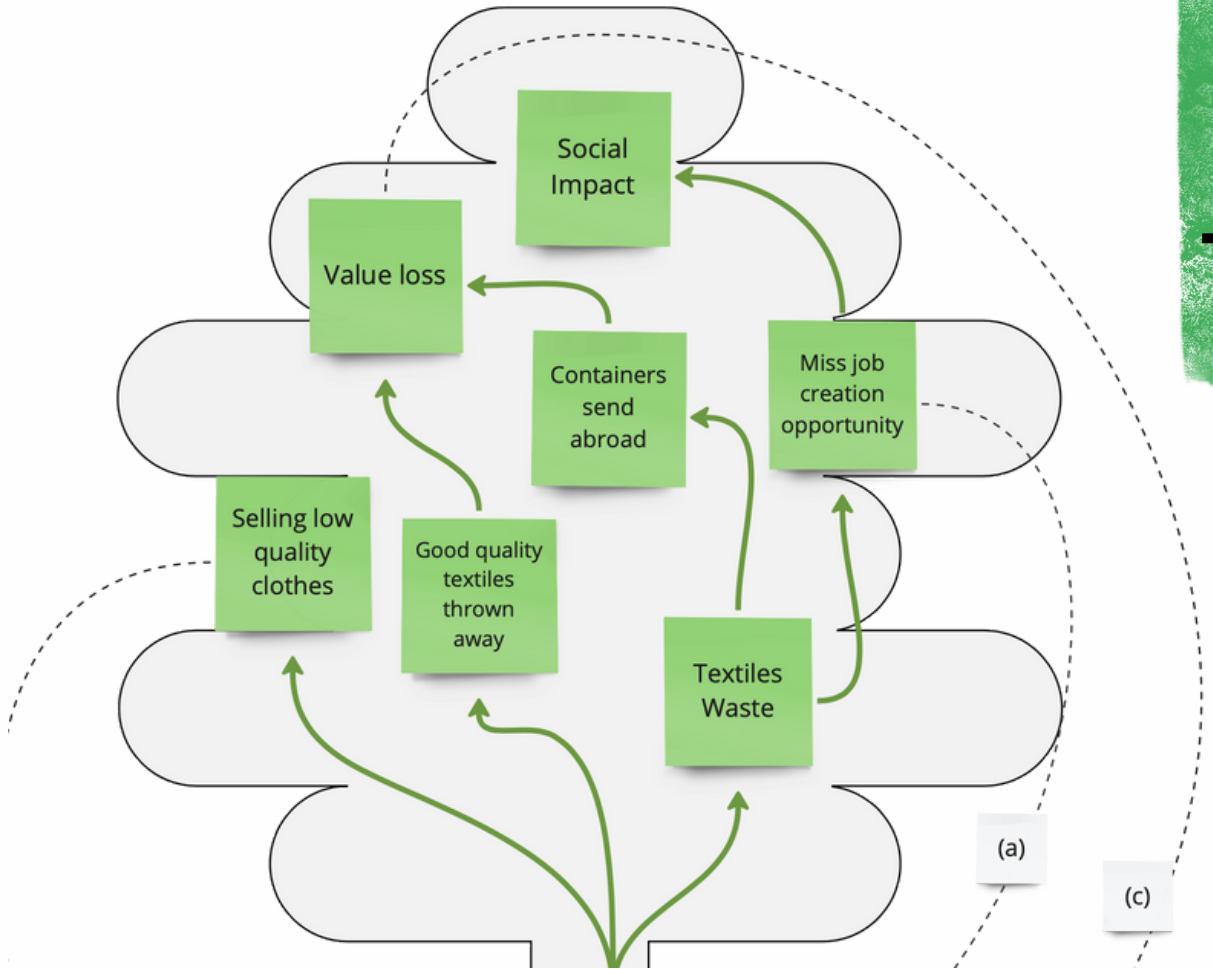
- Good-quality textiles are discarded and sent abroad (Spain or Africa).
- It also means that bad-quality textiles are sold really cheaply.
- Schroeder loses creating value out of textile, and can't increase its income.

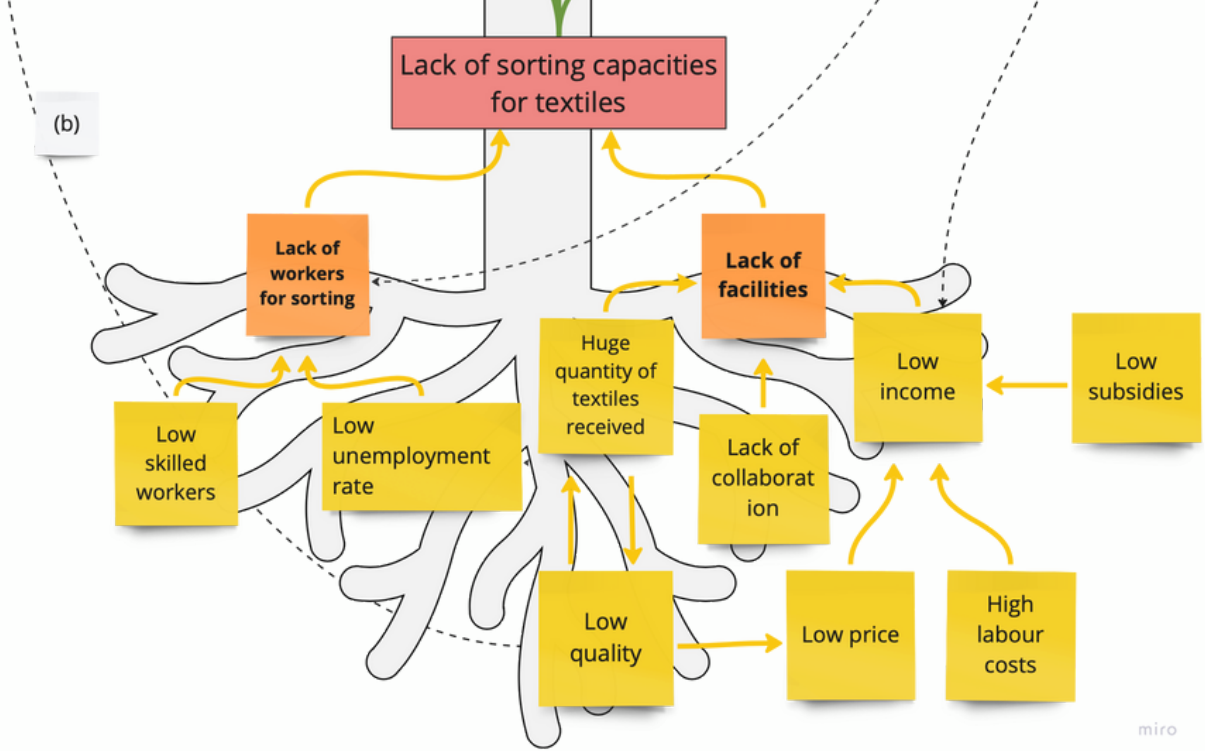
**Negative Feedback loops** (*see tree map*):

- (a) Not enough workers leads to missed job chances, but fewer jobs mean fewer workers for sorting.
- (b) Low-quality textiles mean less income, creating financial challenges.
- (c) Low funds prevent investment, resulting in more good textiles waste and loss of income.





# Tree Map





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-  Influence/ effect chain
-  Negative feedback loop between consequences/causes

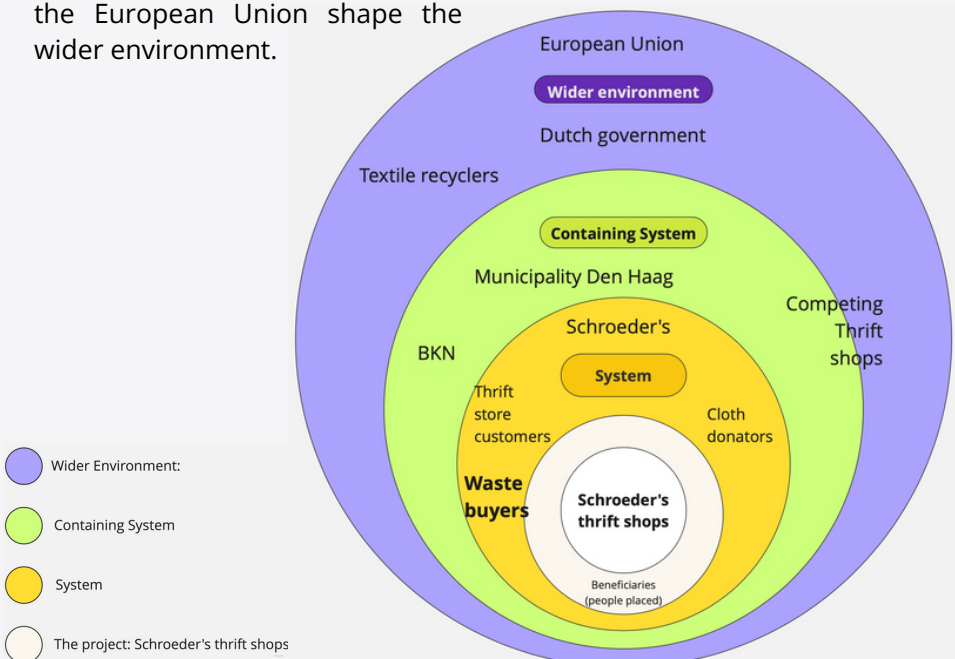


# WHO IS INVOLVED?

Schroeder is embedded within a general social, economic, and environmental context as illustrated by the onion model by Alexander (2004):

Schroeder's thrift shops, reintegrate **individuals distanced from the labor market**. The direct system involves Schroeder, its staff, and volunteers, while the containing system, led by the municipality, places individuals in work enterprises. Macroeconomic conditions and legal frameworks from the Dutch Government and the European Union shape the wider environment.

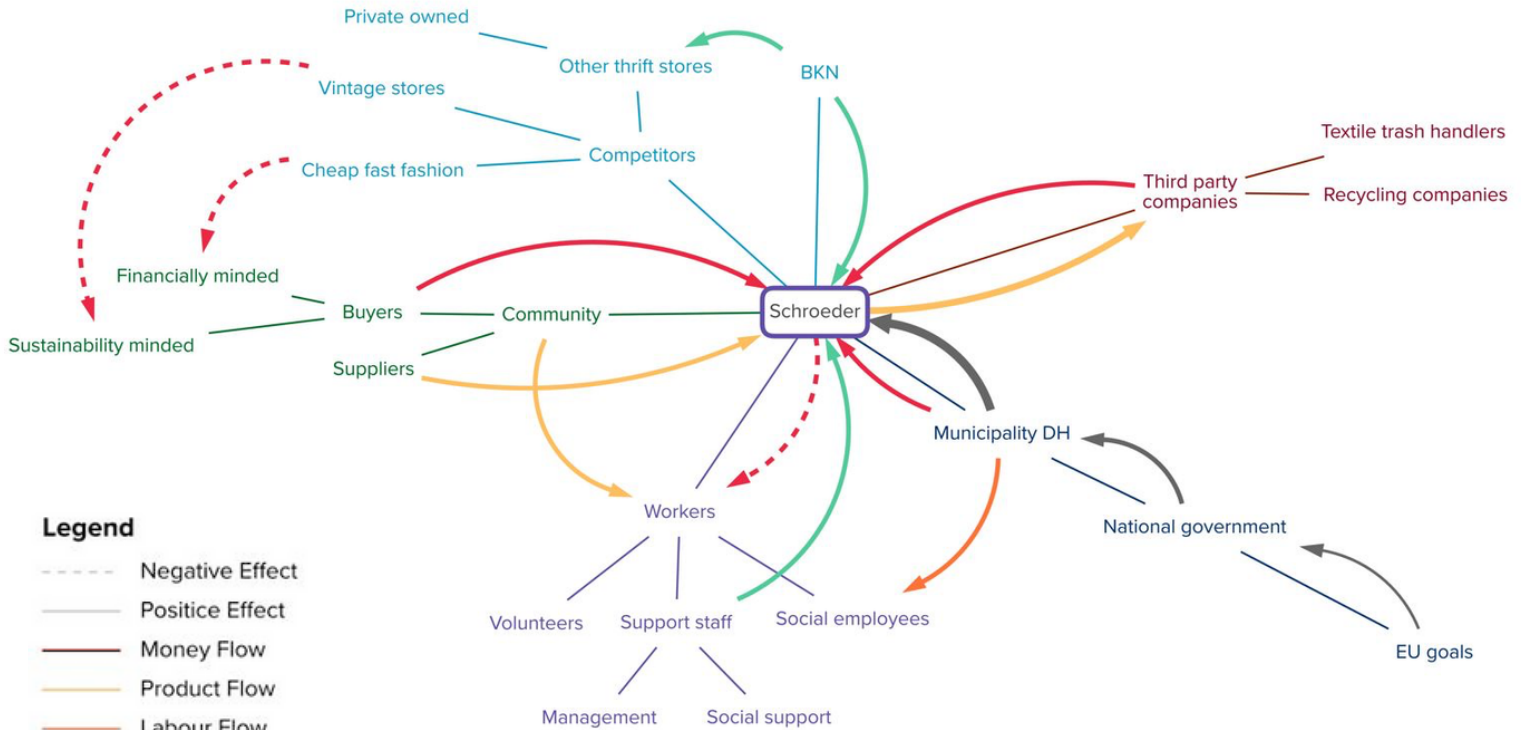
Circular goals, influenced by the wider environment, drive competition among firsthand/fast fashion shops since they must also take back used clothes. **The Hague municipality** oversees targets and subsidies, addressing "hidden actors" - unemployed individuals beyond local government or Schroeder's reach (Jahnz & Stocheva, 2023; Government of the Netherlands, n.d.; Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, n.d.).



**To explain the interaction between the different levels of stakeholders we created the following table explaining the net map thereafter.**

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Impact on the core problem</b>	<b><i>How are they impacted by the core problem?</i></b>
<b>Municipality of The Haag</b>	The subsidies impact Schroeder's capacity to invest and ability to hire workers like the social employees, i.e. meaning the people distant from the labor market. Sorting clothes requires manpower, so the municipality's subsidies enable a higher sorting capacity.	If there is a low sorting capacity and not a lot of clothes are sorted and sent to recycling this negatively impacts the municipality's recycling targets.
<b>Workers</b>	They play a central role in sorting processes, they sort, value the textiles, organising, label to be sold and stock them etc.	The lack of manpower, like potential workers from the community affects the workers at Schroeder. They are overwhelmed and results in no sorting sometimes, because of huge amount of clothes received.
<b>Branchvereniging Kringloop Nederland (BKN)</b>	Other thrift shops are also not able to sort all their clothes, which creates a big gap in sorting capacity in the region.	They also receive huge amount of unsorted clothes.
<b>Community</b>	The donors bring clothes in good and bad quality, sorted and unsorted to the shop, so are contributing to mass of textiles donated. The thrift shop customers buy the clothes,	This huge influx of cloth donations has an impact on the buyers in the thrift store. Since, some bags donated are never sorted, so not sold, because there are too many and they are discarded by a shipping/recycling firm instead.
<b>Third-party companies</b>	Recycling firms and trash handlers buy a kilogram of unsorted clothes for 0,20€ and thereby leave Schroeder with a low income and loss of value.	This trade with Schroeder gives the third party companies a positive impact since these clothes are a cheap input for recycled products later on.





# EXPLORING PERSPECTIVES STAKEHOLDERS' FEEDBACK

In our pursuit of transdisciplinarity over the past month, our **encounters** with various stakeholders have been eye-opening. The **unique perspectives** offered by store employees from Schroeder have contributed significantly to our understanding of the textile sorting issue.

Volunteering exposed us to the subjective nature of clothing sorting, involving 2-3 staff members daily. Uniform protocols attempt to ensure consistency across shops, however, the challenge lies in the volume and variety of donations, ranging from all seasons and often arriving stained or damaged. Surprisingly, donations are accepted on the spot, without prior inspection, allowing donors a 10% gift voucher. The shortage of time and staff makes it difficult to promptly sort all received bags, contributing to the significant issue of textile waste.

Our discussions with managers revealed a **multifaceted challenge**. Beyond the evident need for increased sorting capacities and additional workers, they stressed the necessity for skill development among the existing workforce. At Zilverstraat, workers receive support from job coaches, but personalized instruction in essential work skills, such as organizing workspaces and effective communication, is lacking.

This absence of tailored training results in inefficiencies, as highlighted by the managers juggling the responsibilities of shop organisation, team management, and individual mentoring.

Our volunteering experience also shed light on the **social dimension** of Shroeder's mission. Conversations with a social worker from the 'Buurthuis' revealed the profound impact on the community. Shroeder serves as a welcoming space, where individuals can walk in for coffee and a cookie. This place facilitates the sharing of troubles and the identification of those in need, particularly among the elderly and homeless. The social workers act as the **community's eyes**, signaling when help is required and connecting individuals with the right resources. It became evident that Shroeder's social mission extends beyond the confines of the store, significantly influencing and positively impacting people's lives.

The perspectives of both workers and managers have **deepened our understanding** of the textile sorting challenges at Shroeder stores, revealing not only logistical hurdles but also the social impact of their mission.





## Den Haag

The perspective of the Municipality of The Hague was also valuable for our understanding and for redefining the core problem.

Our discussion with a civil servant revealed that the Municipality sees the problem as a **lack of coordination** within the ecosystem of thrift stores in the city, and between other, related sectors (such as second-hand shops, repair stores, recycling companies, etc.). This was also the conclusion of an ecosystem report by Wageningen University of Research (WUR; De Wagenaar, 2022). The municipality identifies **sorting inefficiency**, not income, as a key issue. Advocating for improved organization and collaboration.

Intersectoral meetings are frequent, but **collective action** in order to scale up the sorting operation of textiles appears to be lacking. With the sorting center in cooperation with Kringloop Den Haag possibly becoming a reality, a step is taken in the right direction.

The Municipality encourages Schroeder and like-minded stakeholders to adopt a more 'hardcore' **entrepreneurship mindset**. **Risk-taking** is part of conducting a business, even a social one. The Municipality is there to help and assist wherever possible, but at the same time there are strict regulations surrounding public procurement and investment by local governments.

The Municipality is an advocate for a **local, social sorting system** within the confines of The Hague. Currently, this is not the case. By involving stakeholders like Schroeder to work together in order to construct a sorting center, the Municipality hopes to encourage more cooperation.

Organizations like Schroeder need a solid business case, both to receive subsidies from the local or national government, and because of funding requirements by banks. Currently, according to the Municipality, banks see little **growth and investment opportunities**, holding back the growth of the circular economy. Social businesses like Schroeder attach significant value to their mission, which can be detrimental to scaling and growth opportunities of the business and thus the total social impact it can have.



# DESIGN THINKING

## A USER-CENTERED APPROACH

Putting users in the center of our plans, we incorporated a design-thinking mindset. Meaning that we treated our output as hypothesis and went to **verify our hypothesis** with related stakeholders.

Thus, we were also interested in finding out whether (1) our stakeholders approved of the interventions we have suggested, and (2) our contents matched their insights and experiences, working in the field themselves. For this, we spoke to managers from Schroeder stores. We also tried to contact Kringloop Den Haag another big player in the same area, but we were unable to meet up with them.

The ToC has been iterated several times. At first, we thought that one of the goals within the textile section was to create more job opportunities. However, we realized that instead of hoping to create more vacancies, Schroeder is facing a problem of lacking sufficient manpower capacity. Recognizing this shift, we came up with different ideas to build a closer bond community to attract more potential workers/ volunteers.

Reflecting on the theory of change, a store manager of Schroeder expressed concerns regarding the investment that would be needed to do the bulk-sale intervention. Where will the people and money be drawn from?

Another example of iteration is that we held a **small-scale experiment** (see picture below) to see if the clothes originally labeled as discarded could still have values. It turns out that some clothes that have a little dirt or holes, which are not suitable to stock in store, will still be considered if selling at a lower price (i.e. bulk sale).

Thus, we proposed that holding bulk sales with nearby universities might be beneficial for monetary value creation. It will also contribute to textile sustainability, and might as well attract students to become future volunteers.



Nov 2023 - Leiden University:  
stakeholder problem presentation

# THEORY OF CHANGE

## Theory of Change (ToC)

We came up with the ToC by:

- Engaging with various stakeholders, including meeting with the municipality and volunteering to interact with store workers, customers, and managers
- A meeting with a policymaker from the municipality of The Hague provides insights into the perception of textile waste issues and the set targets.
- We explored ideas implemented by other thrift shops in the Netherlands/EU for inspiration for our activities in answers to the specific needs.
- Applying **Design Thinking** (DT), we presented our Theory of Change to the manager at Torenstraat, gaining valuable insights into the feasibility of these proposed options and their alignment with the perception of the core problem.

Upon reflection of the vision and problem statement of Schroeder, we believe that by empowering workers with more coaching to acquire skills, having more volunteers to help out in stores, enhancing the sorting capacity, and eliminating textile waste, Schroeder can achieve its vision of having a stable revenue stream to support its care for the workers, and at the same time enabling textile circularity.

## Proposed Activities Explained

Down below, we picked the two most relevant activities and elaborate.

### Pre-sorting System

To accelerate the sorting process for workers, it is proposed to install designated boxes in various shops. These boxes would be categorized, such as shoe boxes, dirty clothes, jeans, and jumpers, allowing customers to place their items in the respective boxes when donating to Schroeder. This initiative aims to enhance the efficiency of the sorting process and concurrently raise awareness about the work involved in textile sorting.

### Bulk Sale with Partners

By holding bulk sales with partners (i.e. nearby university), Schroeder can introduce the clothes that are classified as unsuitable to stock in stores to people who don't mind or can upcycle them into wearable condition again at a low price. It can copy the success model of kilo sales, where clothes are charged by total weight. This not only can boost textile sustainability but can also attract those buyers as future volunteers due to the close bond established through this kind of events outside of the community.

Problem	Resources	Needs	Activities	Short-term outcomes	Long-term outcomes	Vision
<p>Around 60% of textile donated to Schroeder and its potential monetary and environmental sustainability value are being wasted due to insufficient sorting capacity</p>	<p>Schroeder relied on government's subsidies to hire workers distant from the labour market</p> <p>They receive textiles from citizens hoping to upcycle them in their second-hand stores to build a business model to support its organization stability</p>	<p>In need for workers to acquire skills</p>	<p><b>Job coaching:</b> Teaching workers skills about working, communication &amp; organization in every stores</p>	<p>More efficient sorting and easing employees in the labour market</p>	<p>Collected second-hand textiles are in good quality and pre-sorted by doners, the waste sent to third party is minimized, thus creating higher income through sales.</p> <p>Doners, buyers and workers of Schroeder feel included in the community and form a tight bond, and more people are volunteering in stores</p>	<p>Schroeder has a stable revenue stream to support its care for the workers, and at the same time enable textile circularity</p>
		<p>Having more workers and volunteer building a stronger community</p>	<p><b>Workshop:</b> Holding repair workshop to build community that could attract more volunteer</p>	<p>Increasing work force/volunteer, and bringing awareness on waste, promoting repair and reuse</p>		
		<p>Sorting process become more efficiently and with sufficient facilities</p>	<p><b>Pre-sorting system:</b> Encouraging doners to classify clothes by types in the stores</p> <p><b>Collaboration:</b> Setting up sorting facilities with KringloopDen Haag</p>	<p>Pre-sorting is done thus make sorting &amp; labelling more efficient</p>		
		<p>Reducing textile waste and maximizing its circularity</p>	<p><b>Bulk sale with partners:</b> Holding kilo sales outside of stores (e.g. university) to let people buy unstockable clothes in low price and attract volunteer</p>	<p>The textile product life time is prolonged and more sustainable</p>		

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## ABOUT

For the course *Transdisciplinary Skills* as part of the master programme *Governance of Sustainability* at Leiden University, The Netherlands, students were tasked to cooperate with a local organization based in The Hague, working on a topic related to circular economy and social sustainability. During the four-week crash course, students met their contact person(s), assessed the problems that the organizations faced, developed a problem tree, a stakeholder map, and engaged with other stakeholders - in our case the Municipality of The Hague. We enjoyed working with Schroeder, and hope that this zine can offer them some relevant insights!

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