



Cities and consumption: Local solutions to curb textile waste and combat fast fashion

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Introduction

The global fashion industry has seen unprecedented growth in recent decades; global fibre production has more than doubled since the start of the millennium,¹ leading to a significant waste challenge, with the average EU citizen discarding 16 kg of textile waste each year—a total of 6.95 million tonnes in 2020. The average capture rate of textile waste is only 12%, while the remainder flows into mixed municipal waste and is either landfilled or incinerated.² Yet production continues to accelerate at a rapid pace.

Fast fashion, characterised by rapidly changing trends and low prices, has fundamentally altered consumer behaviour. This surge in consumption has created significant environmental and social challenges, such as concerns about labour rights, pollution, and impacts from fibre production and manufacturing. Recent research has shed light on ‘sustainable consumption corridors’³ for fashion and found that only around five new garments per person per year represent a sustainable level of consumption.⁴

Particularly at the local level, cities are grappling with mounting textile waste and the subsequent economic cost and environmental pollution. Moreover, the 2025 EU obligation to separately collect textile waste⁵ presents a significant challenge given the current insufficient textile collection, sorting, reuse, and recycling capacities in much of Europe.

This paper looks at the measures that cities, important hubs for catalysing change and influencing citizen behaviour, can take to tackle the challenges of fast fashion. To address these challenges, some cities are beginning to explore the concept of sufficiency. Sufficiency can be defined as a set of measures and practices aimed at reducing absolute resource and energy consumption while maintaining human well-being within planetary boundaries.⁶ This approach goes beyond efficiency improvements, which often lead to rebound effects, and instead focuses on changing consumption patterns and social norms. In doing so, we ensure that the way we consume and produce products fits within the ecological ceiling of our planet’s finite resources while meeting a minimum threshold of social and wellbeing indicators.

¹ Statista (2024) [Textile fiber production worldwide 1975–2030](#).

² European Environmental Agency (2024) [Management of used and waste textiles in Europe’s circular economy](#).

³ i: Defining consumption corridors enables humanity to live well within planetary boundaries. While lower limits of consumption ensures minimal needs satisfaction for all, upper limits to consumption are equally essential, especially in those domains where limits enhance rather than undermine essential freedoms. See: Fuchs, Sahakian, Gumbert, Di Giulio, Maniates, Lorek, Graf (2021) [Consumption Corridors. Living a Good Life within Sustainable Limits](#).

⁴ HotorCool (2022) [Unfit, unfair, unfashionable](#).

⁵ [Directive 2008/98/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 November 2008 on waste](#).

⁶ IPCC (2022) [Climate Change 2022. Mitigation of Climate Change. Summary for Policymakers](#), p. 35.

To introduce sufficiency in the textiles sector and counter the sector's negative externalities, municipalities have several key levers at their disposal to address fashion overconsumption:

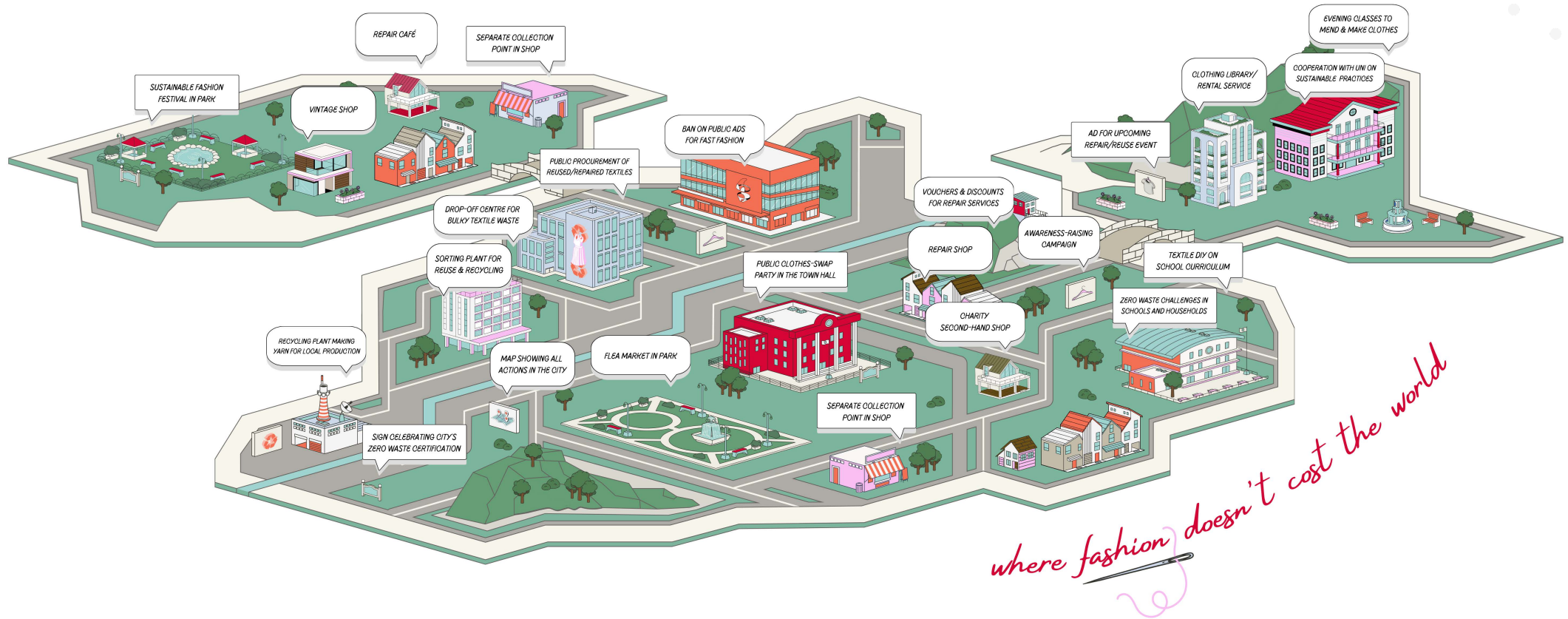
1. Influencing purchasing behaviour and restricting advertisements;
2. Extending the lifespan of fashion items by promoting repair and reuse initiatives;
3. Raising awareness to promote behavioural change (through events, festivals, educational campaigns, etc).

A fourth channel municipalities can pursue is to collectively advocate for broader policy changes at national, European, and international levels—for example, calling on the policymakers to legislate on fast fashion.

This introduction to textile sufficiency at the local level explores these strategies, presenting case studies and practical examples from cities around Europe that are taking innovative approaches to tackle the challenges posed by fast fashion. By implementing measures that promote more sufficiency-based behaviours, cities can play a crucial role in accelerating our societal transition towards more sustainable and equitable fashion consumption patterns, ultimately contributing to waste reduction, a just transition, and greater environmental protection.

Figure 1: Map of local sufficiency solutions

Greetings from **SUFFICIENCYCITY**





Zero Waste Europe (ZWE) is the European network of communities, local leaders, experts, and change agents working towards a better use of resources and the elimination of waste in our society. We advocate for sustainable systems; for the redesign of our relationship with resources; and for a global shift towards environmental justice, accelerating a just transition towards zero waste for the benefit of people and the planet. www.zerowasteurope.eu



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