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Fuentes, Christian; Hedegård, Lars

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Recirculating products: valuation practices and the socio-material making of second-hand products

Christian Fuentes

Department of Service Studies, Lund University, Lund, Sweden, and

Lars Hedegård

*Department of Business Administration and Textile Management,
University of Borås, Borås, Sweden*

Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the recirculation of products by empirically exploring, conceptualising and explaining how second-hand goods are made in practices and processes of valuation.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper takes a practice theory approach to valuation and draws on an ethnographic study of ReTuna, a second-hand shopping mall, to explore the valuation processes involved in the recirculation of products.

Findings – The analysis shows that the valuation of second-hand items is accomplished through multiple sets of sorting, modifying, pricing and marketing practices. These practices involve registers of valuing, draw on and depend on valuation devices and valuation competence, and are guided by regimes of valuing that support the coordinated evaluation and devalorisation/revalorisation of second-hand items.

Research limitations/implications – This paper shows the importance of considering valuation to understand how the recirculation of products can be accomplished. It develops a novel theoretical approach – a practice theory approach to valuation – to explore how and under what conditions donated goods are transformed from discarded and devalued goods to valuable, exchangeable second-hand products.

Practical implications – For those interested in promoting a circular economy generally, and retailers and marketers of second-hand goods more specifically, understanding the process and complexities of valuation is crucial to develop methods, procedures and techniques to evaluate and valorise sourced goods properly. Mapping out the revaluation processes is therefore key when working strategically to develop, stabilise and calibrate processes of revaluation.

Originality/value – The paper contributes to circular economy research by explaining the social and material processes of valuation underlying the recirculation of products. It demonstrates how valuation is accomplished, what elements this involves and how it is coordinated.

Keywords Second-hand, Circular economy, Valuation, Practice theory, Sustainability, Retail, Qualitative research

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The circular economy (CE) is attracting attention from both industry and governments (Geissdoerfer *et al.*, 2017). The CE programme sets out to break with the take-make-dispose linear economy and instead establish a circular system in which products, materials and resources are circulated in "closed" loops (Hobson, 2016; Mylan *et al.*, 2016). The recirculation of materials needed to enact the CE is, in turn, to be accomplished by introducing a host of circular policies and technologies supporting the reuse, repair, reselling and recycling of goods (Schulz *et al.*, 2019). This broad programme of economic reconfiguration has attracted scholarly interest and given way to an interdisciplinary academic field (Hobson *et al.*, 2021). Today, the vibrant CE research field discusses issues such as CE policy and its implementation, circular business models, circular design, circular engineering processes and decision-making frameworks for more circular organisations (Hobson *et al.*, 2021; Merli *et al.*, 2018) [1].

However, despite the important contributions made by the CE research field, most studies neglect the social and cultural processes involved in this economic reconfiguration programme (Corvellec *et al.*, 2022; Schulz *et al.*, 2019). This means, among other things, that the social and organisational processes behind the revaluing of products remain under-researched. While it is evident and often acknowledged that the CE depends on processes that can maintain the value of products, materials and resources as long as possible (Merli *et al.*, 2018), how this is accomplished has received relatively little scholarly attention. This is an important research gap. If we are to understand how a CE can be accomplished on a broader scale, we need to understand how products, materials and resources that have lost value can become valuable again. How long a product will be in use, if it is reused or repaired, and how it will be disposed of are all connected to the valuation of said product. The circulation of products hinges on valuation. Understanding how the circulation of products, materials and resources can be established requires understanding the underlying process of valuation.

This paper explores the process of valuation and its connection to product circulation by taking second-hand retail as an example. As has been established in previous research, reselling previously owned goods is key for the organisation of the CE. Since the early 2000s, second-hand markets have gone from being an alternative phenomenon to occupying a more mainstream position (Guiot and Roux, 2010), and we have in recent years seen a growth in pure second-hand actors, digital and brick-and-mortar actors and the selling of second-hand as an added service among numerous retailers, particularly in the fashion industry. However, despite its growth and the importance attributed to second-hand markets as a key component of the CE (Ki *et al.*, 2021), we know relatively little about the practices and processes that lead to the revaluation of previously owned goods.

Admittedly, research on second-hand markets is extensive. Studies have explored how and why consumers dispose of goods, how these goods are sold through various second-hand practices and finally, how and why consumers acquire these goods. This research has shown that there are several ways in which consumers can dispose of goods – for example, donating to charity, giving away to family – and that the reasons for doing so vary (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010; Gregson *et al.*, 2007). It has furthermore explored a variety of second-hand stores and retailing practices, including retro (Brembeck and Sörum, 2017), antique (Parsons, 2010), charity (Gregson *et al.*, 2000), vintage stores (McColl *et al.*, 2013) and online platforms (Podkalicka, 2022; Yrjölä *et al.*, 2021). Finally, when exploring the shopping of second-hand goods, studies have demonstrated that there are typically three types of reasons for engaging in second-hand consumption: critical (sustainability issues), recreational (hedonistic) and economic (Bardhi and Arnould, 2005; Fernando *et al.*, 2018;

Guiot and Roux, 2010; Schibik *et al.*, 2022; Rathi *et al.*, 2023; Tangri and Yu, 2023; Williams and Paddock, 2003).

This research offers some indications as to how and why second-hand products are valued. It shows that goods can lose their value for material reasons (e.g. breakdown, wear and tear and incompatibility with new practices and infrastructures), symbolic reasons (e.g. changing styles, aesthetics or trends and loss of personal value or novelty) or a combination thereof. It also shows that these goods are often revalued in second-hand retailing by connecting them to various periods and styles, framing them as sustainable alternatives or positioning them as affordable. Finally, this research stream shows that consumers can engage in second-hand consumption for various reasons and that this consumption can be culturally, economically and instrumentally driven.

However, while these studies offer some insights into how and why goods are discarded and become valuable again, they seldom make the valuation processes the focus of empirical attention, nor do they theorise this process explicitly. This means that neither CE research nor the more specific field of second-hand markets has adequately addressed the processes of valuation underlying product recirculation.

Against this background, the paper aims to empirically explore, conceptualise and explain how second-hand goods are made in practices and processes of valuation. We set out to understand the socio-material mechanism behind the recirculation of products by investigating how and under what conditions donated goods are transformed from discarded and devalued goods to valuable, exchangeable second-hand products. This, we contend, is key to understanding how and under what conditions economies can be made more circular.

To accomplish this, we develop a practice theory approach to valuation, making the assessment, generation and diffusion of value the centre of attention. Focusing on practices of valuation, this framework shifts focus from efforts to understand value to exploring, theorising and explaining processes of valuation. All value is here treated as an accomplishment, an outcome of practices and processes (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013). Drawing on this framework, we analyse sets of valuation practices, how these practices lead to the evaluation and (de)valorising of previously owned goods, and the elements that enable and shape this valuation process.

Drawing on an ethnographic investigation of ReTuna, a second-hand shopping mall in Eskilstuna, Sweden, we show that the revaluation of goods involved multiple valuation practices. As donated items were sorted, modified, priced and marketed, they were continuously evaluated and devalorised/revalorised. This work relied on various valuation devices and a wide range of valuation competencies among staff. The complexity arising from these overlapping practices, devices, competencies, and registers of valuing created coordination problems, which were partly solved by the development and emergence of de- and revaluation regimes that aligned multiple valuation practices towards a shared objective. We show that, ultimately, only items that avoided devaluation and were successfully integrated into one or more revaluation modes were materially and semiotically transformed into valuable second-hand products.

Our analysis contributes to CE research by bringing to the fore the processes of valuation involved in the recirculation of goods. It shows the complexity of the social and cultural processes involved in trying to recirculate products and enact circular economies. However, while we show that the processes of valuation underlying the recirculation of goods are complex and fraught with failure, we also offer insight into how to better organise the processes of valuation so that used and devalued goods regain value. Drawing attention to and conceptualising the valuation of used goods serves as a critique of simplistic and overly

celebratory accounts of the CE and offers a more grounded and realistic account of and insights into how the recirculation of goods can be accomplished.

The paper is structured as follows. In Sections 2 and 3, we outline our practice theory approach to valuation and describe the ethnographic study on which the analysis is based. Section 4 is a combined results and analysis section addressing the valuation practices performed and the identified valuation regimes. We then discuss in Section 5 how this analysis and the specific theorisation of revaluation developed contribute to research on the CE and valuation studies.

2. A valuation-in-practice framework: elements, modes and regimes

To understand how previously owned and devalued goods become valuable again in the context of second-hand retailing, we combine practice theory and valuation studies to develop a theoretical framework around the notion of valuation practices.

As often pointed out, practice theory is not a singular theory, but a school of thought used differently across the social sciences (Schatzki, 2001). What unifies most practice theories is the contention that social phenomena should be understood as enacted through social practices (Reckwitz, 2002). Practices – typically defined as a set of interlinked bodily and mental activities involving and linked by understandings, know-how, skill, emotions, motivational knowledge and material artefacts – thus take centre stage (Reckwitz, 2002). Practice theory has, for example, been applied in service marketing (Skålén *et al.*, 2023), consumption studies (Warde, 2005) and management and organisation studies (Nicolini, 2012).

Similarly, valuation studies is an interdisciplinary research field interested in how values are produced, diffused and assessed across empirical sites (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013). This field includes contributions from, e.g. economic sociology, science and technology studies, management and organisation studies, market studies and cultural anthropology. There are numerous ways of approaching valuation, such as conversation analysis, political economy studies, classic organisation theory or pragmatist approaches (Doganova *et al.*, 2018; Hauge, 2016). Valuation studies is, therefore, not a singular approach but a research field characterised by theoretical pluralism.

In this paper, we combine selected concepts and insights from these two partly overlapping schools of thought to develop a specific set of concepts focused on exploring valuation as an outcome of social practices. This combination is perhaps not as novel as it may appear, as valuation studies frequently examine practices, and practice theory studies commonly discuss the value(s) involved in and generated by practices. What follows is an effort to fuse parts of these two theoretical resources into a framework for understanding how previously discarded products can be made into valuable second-hand goods and thus recirculated. The framework outlined here is thus an enabling theory (Dolbec *et al.*, 2021), which is then used to analyse a specific empirical case of valuation and, from this analysis, develop a specific practice theory of revaluation.

2.1 Valuation practices

By valuation practices, we refer to "any social practice where the value or values of something are established, assessed, negotiated, provoked, maintained, constructed and/or contested" (Doganova *et al.*, 2014). In this framework, value is not given; instead, it is the outcome of processes of social work enacted through a wide range of activities, including both the production and circulation of goods (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013). Value is thus attributed through action and subsequent processes of qualification or requalification (Heinich, 2020). Values are here neither completely subjective, dependent solely on the

interactions of actors, nor completely objective, dependent exclusively on the qualities of the thing (or good) (Heinich, 2020; Muniesa, 2011).

According to Vatin (2013), valuation involves both evaluation – the act of classifying things as valuable or not – and valorising – the act of making things valuable (Heuts and Mol, 2013). Following this, valuation can involve setting a good's price, such as a book or clothing item, or the non-monetary assessment of, for example, movies, films, art or scholarly work. However, it can also involve the material design, production and marketing of books and clothing items, that is, practices aimed at valorising these goods rather than merely evaluating them. In our analysis, we will distinguish between these two types of valuations but see these as simultaneous and interconnected acts (see also, Heuts and Mol, 2013) enacted in the same practices. The attribution of value can also be both positive and negative. Hence, it can involve valorisation and devalorisation (Heinich, 2020). The same acts that add value to goods can also devalue them.

Moreover, valuation involves the material-semiotic transformation of goods. In the valuation processes – both evaluation and (de)valorising – goods commonly change in material terms – for example, through design and production processes – and semiotically – through reviews, advertisements and display practices. As others have pointed out, actors involved in valuation are not merely engaged in passively evaluating goods but actively participating in defining them (Heinich, 2020).

The work of valuation can be carried out in single practices but also in multiple interlinked bundles or complexes of practices. So, for example, writing a consumer online product review can be described as a single practice of valuation in which the product is both evaluated and (de)valorised; the valuation of job applicants typically involves a complex of interconnected practices such as preliminary selection, interviews with select candidates, aptitude tests and the writing of evaluations. All these practices are interlinked to form a recruitment process that is simultaneously a valuation process.

Finally, there is a spatial dimension to valuation. All valuation is located in a particular site (Greeson, 2020) – e.g. a store, an online website, a town hall, a farmers' market or a sorting centre. Moments of valuation are always temporally and spatially situated. Moreover, valuation happens in multiple sites simultaneously; valuation sites are "arenas where the value of things - including peculiar things such as pieces of nature or years of human life - are debated and put on trial" (Doganova *et al.*, 2014). For example, if a product moves from practice to practice and/or site to site, it can undergo various valuation trials. Valuations made on one site do not necessarily carry to the next (Hauge, 2019), but can influence each other (Greeson, 2020).

2.2 Valuation registers, devices and competence

Theories of practice often emphasise that practices are guided by motivational knowledge, meanings or goals. Theories of practice, however, also emphasise that merely knowing why you are doing something is not enough to successfully perform that practice. To properly perform a practice, you also need resources: the competence and know-how required, and the devices, tools and infrastructures needed to carry out a practice (Reckwitz, 2002). In line with this, we put forward that valuation practices require, involve and interlink a set of valuation elements. More specifically, valuation practices, we contend, are guided by registers of valuing (dictating how to establish value and what counts as valuable) and typically require specific valuation competence (what you need to be able to evaluate and/or valorise something) and valuation devices (here used to denote concepts, tools and infrastructure supporting valuation).

Registers of valuing can be thought of as schemes or frames that guide how goods are evaluated and valorised. In their analysis of valuing tomatoes, Heuts and Mol (2013) show that there are many ways to assess and improve (or evaluate and valorise) the "good" of a tomato, and these systems of deciding what is good are multiple and varied. Monetary or economic value is only one such register in their analysis. Others include the history of the tomato, how it has been handled, its naturalness, and its sensual (taste, smell and feeling) character. Heuts and Mol thus use the concept of registers of valuing to show the co-existence of multiple valuations, showing that registers of valuing can, at times, be used simultaneously without friction (e.g. a tomato with a good history can be priced higher), but they can also be in conflict (e.g. a natural tomato is not necessarily aesthetically pleasing).

Valuation processes typically also involve numerous actors (e.g. designers, advertisement professionals, social media managers, retail staff and consumers) with varied competencies. By valuation competence, we refer to the competence needed to evaluate and valorise an object, the cultural repertoire an actor mobilises in the valuation process. For example, an art gallery owner needs specific competence (in art products, styles, art demand, etc.) to evaluate art (Borgblad, 2019). He/she also needs to know when and how to present the work of art, reach potential buyers and communicate the piece's value.

Valuation studies also emphasise the importance of socio-technical arrangements that make valuation practices possible (Moor and Lury, 2011). Valuation involves and tends to rely on multiple valuation devices that can be both material and non-material (e.g. ranking schemes, calculation methods, display devices, packaging, smartphones and websites) (Helgesson and Muniesa, 2013). Previous studies have, e.g. examined the role of shopping carts (Cochoy, 2008), whiteboards (Hauge, 2016), the concept of lean management (Hauge, 2019) or brand valuation systems as devices (Moor and Lury, 2011). Of course, while valuation devices are performative in that they not only affect how value is established but also what counts as valuable (Hauge, 2019), the introduction of valuation devices does not automatically lead to changes in valuation (Hauge, 2016). Valuation devices are part of valuation practices, must interact with other devices and must be used by multiple human actors with varying competence in specific contexts.

2.3 Regimes of valuing

Finally, loosely inspired by practice theory (Schatzki, 2002), we use the concept of regimes of valuing to denote a general approach to valuing governing across valuation practices with a loosely defined common goal in mind. Regimes of valuing are complex arrangements involving and interconnecting several modes of valuing (Hauge, 2016), as well as the specific configurations of valuation devices and competencies attached to these. Moreover, a regime of valuing can incorporate diverse modes of valuing on the condition that these modes of valuing are, despite their differences, working towards the same general goal. Regimes of valuing not only govern valuation practices but are also produced through these practices. While regimes of valuing can be developed/designed (intentionally and strategically), they can also emerge in practice as a collectively produced coordination mechanism.

Regimes of valuing do not evolve in isolation but emerge in relation to one another. These interactions may be mutually reinforcing or antagonistic. In some cases, hybridisation between seemingly incompatible regimes is possible, as demonstrated by Hawkins (2013) in her study of public service broadcasting, where public and commercial value regimes are frequently combined. However, such coordination is not assured. As Fochler (2016) illustrates in the context of research production, epistemic and capitalist regimes of value often conflict and undermine each other.

2.4 A valuation approach to second-hand retailing practices
In our analysis, we draw on this framework to analyse the sorting and retailing practices performed at ReTuna as valuation practices involving acts of both evaluation and (de)valorising. We will discuss how the actors involved in the sorting and preparation of these goods for sale make use of various valuation devices, specific sets of valuation competence and registers of valuing. We are here interested in the valuation processes involved in turning previously owned and devalued goods into valuable exchange goods. However, in our analysis, we focus on the practices of second-hand retailing. We do not follow the products into the realm of consumption. The insights of previous research discussing consumption and valuation suggest that consumers, like other actors, do not necessarily "accept" previously made valuations but can and often do actively partake in the (re)valuation of goods (see, e.g. Mellet, Beauvisage, Beuscart and Trespeuch, 2014; Balsiger and Jammet, 2022; Lury *et al.*, 2024). More specifically, previous studies on the valuation of used goods have argued that "situated moments of valuation are never divorced from temporally and spatially prior and subsequent moments of valuation and waste production" (Greeson, 2020, p. 168). That is, they shape, but do not determine each other. So, in other words, as these second-hand goods are shopped for and put to use in everyday practices, they will undergo new trials of evaluation and (de)valorising, guided and shaped by valuation devices, competencies and registers available to consumers. We can assume with some degree of certainty that the valuation done at ReTuna will shape consumer valuations. However, to what extent these evaluation and valorising acts correspond to the valuation work done by retailers is an empirical question beyond the scope of this study.

3. Methods and materials
We conducted an ethnographic study to understand the valuation practices of revaluating goods at ReTuna. The combination of on-site observations and interviews with actors involved in organising this second-hand mall allowed us to explore how donated items were sorted and worked on in a complex of practices aimed at producing valuable second-hand products. Below, we introduce our general research approach before describing and discussing the fieldwork and analysis.

3.1 Research approach
The research adopted an abductive approach, involving a continual back-and-forth between the outlined theoretical framework and the empirical data. This methodology aligns with Dolbec *et al.*'s (2021) characterisation of abductive research as iterative, wherein existing theories and unexpected findings are combined throughout all stages of research to develop new theories. The ethnography-inspired fieldwork, which combined interviews and observations, enabled immersion in the empirical field and an understanding of the phenomenon within its contextual framework through multiple representations (Healy *et al.*, 2007), a crucial component for an abductive approach.

3.2 Fieldwork
The fieldwork comprised eight research visits to ReTuna, a second-hand shopping mall in Eskilstuna, Sweden, which houses 17 second-hand stores. Using *in situ* ethnographic interviews and observations, the study explored how these stores assess and assign value to used goods. Over the course of the research, a total of 36 days were spent at ReTuna between 2015 and 2021, conducting interviews and participant observations. The combination of interviews and observations made it possible to grasp the interviewees' reasoning behind their approach to handling used goods and gain a firsthand understanding of the practices at

the mall. By focusing on ReTuna, we explored the valuation of various types of goods, as the 17 tenants represented different industries, including furnishing, fashion and textiles, home electronics, sports equipment, building materials and flowers.

A total of 52 interviews were conducted with mall management, store owners/managers, store staff, collection and sorting staff, and other individuals involved in organising the mall, resulting in approximately 42 h of recordings (see Table 1 for details). To cover as many processes and practices as possible, interviewees were selected from all stores and organisational levels, with a primary focus on store owners and managers. When store owners and managers were unavailable, assistants or other employees were interviewed instead. This approach ensured a broad representation of perspectives from across the mall's operations. The length of the interviews varied significantly. Longer initial interviews were combined with shorter follow-up interviews and participant observations, in line with the ethnographic methodology applied (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). Some of the recorded interviews are brief, as they were conducted to complement informal conversations with interviewees during observations. These informal conversations were documented as fieldnotes and are not included in the interview recordings. In addition, interviews were conducted with individuals involved in establishing the mall, as well as with the event and conference management company, which has been involved in marketing activities at ReTuna and the Folk High School [2], which has organised courses on circular design. Furthermore, 21 informal interviews were conducted with donors to better understand how consumers valued the goods they donated.

The interviews were based on non-directive questions (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003) and explored the organisation, as well as the interviewees' descriptions of experiences, processes and relations in the store/department/mall. Multiple interview guides were used, adapted to the informant and their position at ReTuna (see Appendix Table A1 for a list of typical interview questions). In most cases, the interviews were conducted *in situ* (Botticello, 2012), meaning they took place wherever was practically feasible considering each interviewee's situation, such as in stores, the collection and sorting centre, the mall's café, or offices within the mall. Sometimes, digital interviews were conducted due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated travel restrictions. Proximity to the interviewee's work environment facilitated discussions about the physical setting and its impact on valuation practices. All interviews were fully transcribed into the NVivo software package. The quotes were translated into English by the authors.

In addition, three types of observations were conducted: general mall observations, in-store observations and observations in the collection and sorting centre (see Table 2 for details). In total, 49 observations were performed. Nine overall mall observations aimed at gathering material on how the mall's retail space and concept influenced valuation practices. In total, 37 in-store participant observations and three participant observations in the collection and sorting centre aimed at identifying objects and practices contributing to the valuation of goods.

The observations captured how donated and collected goods were sorted, prepared and brought into the stores and what happened with the goods within the stores. The participant observations involved interacting with the observed subjects to gain insights into the rationales behind their actions. For example, questions were posed to workers relating to the issues discussed during interviews. Field notes capturing salient episodes from observations and interviews were made on the same day. In total, 1,470 photographs of the observed settings were taken.

3.3 Analytical procedure
The analysis was conducted in NVivo through an iterative, manual process, in which codes and themes were continuously refined, organised and merged in parallel with a close reading

Table 1 Interviews between 2016 and 2021

Organisation	Role	Sex and age	No. of interviews	Total duration	Type	Documentation
Founding	Sustainability strategist	Male 60–70	1	82 min	DI	Transcription
	Project leader, pilot study	Male 60–70	1	75 min	DI	Transcription
	Project leader, establishment	Male 40–50	1	54 min	DI	Transcription
	Environment/public works director	Female 50–60	1	41 min	DI	Transcription
Mall management	Mall manager 1	Female 40–50	6	7 h	I	Transcriptions
	Event and conference manager 1	Female 30–40	1	51 min	I	Transcription
	Event and conference manager 2	Female 40–50	1	35 min	I	Transcription
	Mall manager 2	Female 30–40	1	63 min	DI	Fieldnotes
Collecting and sorting	Team leader 1	Male 30–40	2	57 min	I	Fieldnotes
	Informal interviews, donators	Males/females 20–70	21	5 h	IS	Fieldnotes
	Team leader 2	Female 30–40	1	13 min	IS	Transcriptions
Stores	Building materials store, team leader	Male 30–40	1	31 min	I	Transcriptions
	Building materials store, assistant	Female 40–50	1	20 min	IS	Transcription
	Baby and kids store, owner 1	Female 30–40	1	9 min	IS	Transcriptions
	Baby and kids store, owner 2	Female 30–40	1	19 min	IS	Transcription
	Furniture and textile store, owner 1	Male 50–60	1	33 min	IS	Transcription
	Furniture and textile store, owner 2	Female 50–60	3	92 min	IS	Transcription
	Kitchen store, owner	Female 30–40	1	13 min	IS	Transcription
	Computer store, store manager	Male 30–40	2	66 min	IS	Transcription Fieldnotes
	Charity store, manager 1	Female 40–50	2	42 min	IS	Transcription
	Charity store, manager 2 and team leader	Male/female 40–55	1	41 min	IS	Transcription
	Fashion store 1, manager, assistants and reprocessing staff	Females/male 30–65	3	71 min	IS	Transcription Fieldnotes

Table 1 Continued

Organisation	Role	Sex and age	No. of interviews	Total duration	Type	Documentation
	Fashion store 1, store owner	Male 60–70	1	65 min	I	Transcription
	Sports store, assistants	Male 50–60	1	28 min	IS	Transcription
	Sports store, a new owner	Male 30–40	2	60 min	IS	Transcription Fieldnotes
	Kids and toys store, assistant	Female 20–30	1	37 min	IS	Transcription
	Florist and kitchen store, owner	Female 30–40	2	2 h 29 min	IS	Transcription
	Vintage clothing store, owner	Female 30–40	2	2 h 9 min	IS	Transcription
	Fashion and interior store, owners	Female 50–60	2	65 min	IS	Transcription
	Fashion store 2, assistants	Female 20–30	2	1 h 32 min	IS	Transcription fieldnotes
	Kids store 2, assistant	Female 20–30	1	27 min	IS	Transcription
	Bookstore, owner	Female 60–70	1	44 min	I	Transcription
	Fashion and interior store 2, owner	Female 40–50	1	45 min	IS	Fieldnotes
Others	Chief executive officer, textile waste company	Female 50–60	1	60 min	I	Transcription
	Export manager, charity organisation	Male 40–50	1	78 min	I	Transcription
	Teacher, the folk high school	Female 60–70	1	52 min	IS	Transcription
	In total:		*52 interviews, 39 individuals*			
			21 informal interviews with donators			
			≈ 42 h			

Note(s): IS = face-to-face *in situ* interview at the workplace; I = face-to-face interview at an office or similar; DI = digital interview via video conferencing system
Source(s): Authors' own work

Table 2. Observations between 2015 and 2021

What	No.	Total duration	Documentation
The mall			
Overview of the mall, incl. pop-up stores	7	7 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Guided tour by the mall manager	1	1 h 11 min	Fieldnotes and photos
Recorded digital guided tour	1	55 min	Transcription
Collecting and sorting			
Collection, sorting and distribution to stores' storage areas	3	32 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Stores			
Building materials store	3	3 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Baby and kids store	2	8 h 20 min	Fieldnotes and photos
Furniture and textile store	3	4 h 29 min	Fieldnotes and photos
Kitchen store	2	50 min	Fieldnotes and photos
Computer store	2	55 min	Fieldnotes and photos
Charity store	4	6 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Fashion store 1	2	8 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Sports store	3	2 h 20 min	Fieldnotes and photos
Kids and toys store	1	2 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Florist and kitchen accessories store	3	3 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Vintage clothing store	3	3 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Fashion and interior store	2	3 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Fashion store 2	2	2 h 30 min	Fieldnotes and photos
Kids store 2	1	1 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Bookstore	2	1 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Fashion and interior store 2	1	1 h	Fieldnotes and photos
Kids store 3	1	30 min	Fieldnotes and photos
In total:		*49 occasions ≈ 91 h*	

Source(s): Authors' own work

of the material (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). At this stage of the analysis, concepts from the theoretical framework – such as devices, sites and competences – served as sensitising concepts to sort and interpret the material by identifying valuation and evaluation practices, valorisation work and registers of valuing. The process resulted in the data structure presented in Figure 1, but began with a thorough reading of transcripts, field notes and photographs to identify concepts aligned with the informants' expressions and observation notes. During this initial phase, the following analytical questions guided the work:

Q1. What valuation practices are performed?

Q2. What elements do they involve?

Q3. How do these practices evaluate and devalorise/revalorise goods?

Q4. What organises these practices and the processes of valuation?

Subsequently, a two-step second-order analysis was conducted to merge and organise the coded material into first-order concepts, second-order themes and an aggregate dimension. In this stage, NVivo was used to manage the coded material, while the comparisons and merging of similar codes were manually performed. Through a continuous process of comparison, codes with conceptual similarities or overlaps were identified and merged, which allowed the refinement of initial codes into broader, more coherent first-order
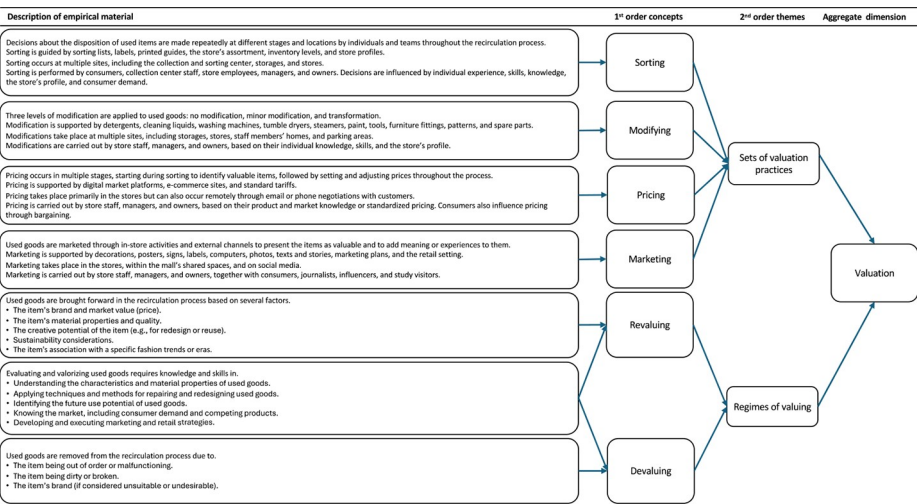
Figure 1. Thematic coding matrix
Source: Adapted from Gioia *et al*. (2013)

concepts. These were then organised into second-order themes and, ultimately, an aggregate dimension. Finally, the findings presented in Section 4 were contextualised with previous research and current knowledge to develop conclusions and implications.

4. The revaluation of products: valuation practices and regimes
In the following sections, we describe, illustrate and analyse the valuation of second-hand products at ReTuna as performed through sets of interlinked practices – sorting, modifying, pricing and marketing – governed by two regimes of valuing.

The analysis is structured into two sections. Firstly, we discuss the sets of valuation practices performed at ReTuna and the multiple registers of valuing, valuation devices and valuation competence involved in the accomplishment of these practices. We show that donated items became revalued by being continuously evaluated and devalorised/revalorised as they moved through sets of sorting, modifying, pricing and marketing practices. Applying the theoretical framework outlined previously, we demonstrate that the valuation processes underlying these practices were materially-semiotically productive and responsible for the successful production of valuable second-hand products.

Secondly, we discuss the regimes of re- and devaluing that have emerged and govern the processes of valuation at ReTuna. While this valuation process was productive, it was also complex and therefore affected by several coordination problems. These coordination problems were partly solved by the emergence of regimes of valuing – loosely connected arrangements that interconnected multiple modes of valuing into two complementary regimes – one focused on the devaluing (and discarding) of goods and one focused on their revaluation. We begin, however, with a short introduction to ReTuna.

4.1 ReTuna: a second-hand shopping mall
ReTuna is a shopping mall established in 2015 and run by a municipality-owned waste and energy company. The owner's goals are to create profit, reduce the amount of incinerated

waste, increase awareness of sustainable consumption and create jobs. To fulfil this, ReTuna collects used goods and distributes them to its tenants, who process and resell them. While the goods are used, the mall's ambition is to be a traditional mall in other aspects, e.g. individual outlets, pop-up stores and a café that offers lunch and snacks. The mall is co-located with a waste recycling station in an industrial area 5 km from the city centre. On average, 400 visitors dispose of goods at the waste recycling station and 750 people visit the mall daily. The number of stores and pop-up shops varies around 15. The owners staff most shops or, less commonly, employees or trainees. Trainees in the stores and the sorting centre often participate in work experience programmes to help them enter the work market. The tenant mix consists of stores specialising in one type of goods (e.g. sports equipment, furnishing, fashion, flowers and home electronics), lifestyle stores and a traditional second-hand charity store.

4.2 Valuation practices at ReTuna
Below, we present and discuss four sets of valuation practices performed at ReTuna. A set consists of several practices interlinked by their overarching function: sorting, modifying, storing, pricing and marketing used goods. The practices involve registers of valuing, valuation devices, valuation competence and both the evaluation and valorising of goods. Taken together, they account for the valuation performed at ReTuna.

4.2.1 Sorting: deciding what to sell and what to discard. The processes of valuation started with a set of sorting practices. Sorting practices involved deciding which donated goods to sell and which to discard. Donors, both consumers and organisations, unloaded their unwanted goods onto trolleys and into boxes outside the collection and sorting centre. The collection centre's staff assisted in the unloading to ensure correct placement and moving the donated goods into the centre for initial sorting. In this first act of evaluation and valorisation, donated items were transformed from devalued goods to valuable second-hand products. While the status of the goods may change along the way, the donations were at this first valuation site deemed as temporarily valuable.

Once inside, the staff removed and disposed of waste and goods not handled by the mall's tenants, for example, mattresses or wet items, due to the risk of contamination or mould. At this second valuation site, goods were evaluated according to a specific register of valuing, in which certain items were found to be without value due to hygiene or health issues and their future-oriented potential was lost.

The donated goods deemed "safe" were moved to a third site, a sorting area where the items were sorted by store staff. Here, goods were placed in the corresponding tenants' sorting area, such as toys for the kids' store. This sorting followed pre-established lists linking categories of goods to certain stores. These lists acted as valuation devices, standardising the evaluation of donated goods. Then, each store's staff performed a more specific sorting to evaluate and pick items matching the store's concept and assortment. The criteria used to evaluate the items varied. For example, the evaluation could be based on the sorting staff's ideas of current trends, possibilities to redesign the items or future areas of use. Also, goods were chosen for their ability to support the store concept, convey particular qualities (e.g. fashionable), price (e.g. affordable) or contribute to the store's profile (e.g. an artsy redesign store). Thus, second-hand goods acted as marketing devices, qualifying other products. Often, these criteria were used simultaneously, as exemplified by the following quote:

> [Home] appliances are easy to sell. Whole series [of porcelain] are always easier to sell. But I also try to have some single pieces. Some people cannot afford expensive ones, so selling them at low

prices is possible. Of course, you look for different brands. You must have some money as well. Stuff that pays better. (Interview with "Jenny", owner of kitchen accessories store, May 2016).

Here, we see the nuances involved in valuation. Some products were considered "easy to sell". A series of home appliances was deemed more valuable than single items. Conversely, single pieces were seen as essential to cater to customers who could not afford the whole series. "Upscale brands" were seen as necessary to generate more revenue. Multiple acts of evaluation, drawing on various registers of valuing, were involved in deciding which products to sell (revalue) and which to discard (devalue).

To summarise, sorting involved interlinked selection acts, sites, devices and workers. Through these practices, donated goods moved from site to site and were evaluated by numerous workers applying multiple registers of valuing. While this valuation work was supported by valuation devices that partly standardised the evaluation of goods, it remained complex and knowledge-demanding.

4.2.2 Modifying: altering the make-up of goods. Also key to the valuation processes at ReTuna were modifying practices. While some stores at ReTuna simply resold the goods, others modified donated goods to add value. These modifications ranged from minor alterations to the complete remaking of goods. Minor modifications included cleaning, washing or steaming donated items to make them more appealing. Scented detergents, washing machines, steam cleaners, polish and irons remove the feeling, appearance and smell of used goods. This is particularly important for clothes, as the connection to "unknown bodies" comes with risk, fear and uncleanliness (Gregson *et al.*, 2000; Valk, 2020). Furthermore, technical goods, such as home electronics or kitchen appliances, were tested to ensure function. These acts involved evaluating second-hand products – e.g. it is dirty and needs washing – and valorising them; washing them adds value since a clean product is more commercially valuable than a dirty one. This was done following specific registers of valuing. While wear and tear may add value to second-hand goods in some instances (for example, when worn by a historical figure), it was more common that second-hand products were deemed more valuable if they smelled, looked and felt new.

Modification also included refurbishing goods to restore their functions. For example, furniture was sanded, painted and repaired; torn jacket pockets and holes were sewn together; broken TVs were merged into functional ones; and spots were covered with transfer print technology. The objective was to come as close as possible to the product's original qualities in terms of functionality and aesthetics.

Finally, redesign transformed donated goods and/or gave them a new purpose, making it possible to offer new types of products with new functions. For example, electronic cables turned into jewellery, garments into stroller upholstery and kitchen accessories into lamps. The register of valuing applied was that of creativity. A creatively remade second-hand good was considered more valuable than a "sell as donated" one.

In summary, second-hand goods can be modified through a range of practices that, in various ways, change the material-semiotic qualities of second-hand goods. These modification practices are both knowledge and labour-intensive and involve evaluation, as second-hand goods are deemed to lack something, and valorisation as values are added through modification. Some characteristics of unwanted goods (for example, smell and dirt) are removed, while others are added. Modifying goods is a complex accomplishment, and different valuing registers are used. These practices involved various devices, such as washing machines and steam cleaners, as well as refurbishing and remaking tools. While devices did not necessarily assist in evaluating goods, they were crucial for valorising. In addition, modification practices require specific competence and know-how. From the

cleaning and testing of goods to their total redesign, the valuation workers need the competence to perform the evaluations and valorising activities properly.

4.2.3 Pricing: determining the monetary value of goods. The prices were either set prices or price estimations, which are usually regarded as more flexible (although all prices are potentially subject to change). Monetary evaluations were central to all the valuation practices discussed. However, what we refer to here are the more specific practices of determining a price, however tentative. Through these practices, what was often a vague monetary evaluation (this could be worth something) was translated into a specific price (it costs 120 SEK).

While sorters made initial price estimations, it was not until later that donated goods were individually evaluated, and an official price was set. Here, several registers of valuing and valuation devices related to market and product knowledge were used. For example, prices were estimated based on condition, age and/or brand, combined with staff members' knowledge of local market prices and/or consumers' perceived willingness to pay for such goods. Other times, the original price of a "new" product and/or other second-hand retailers' prices were used to set the price. Hence, Internet sites for used goods like eBay, ecommerce sites and social media acted as valuation devices when estimating monetary value. The information gathered was then used with rules of thumb, e.g. one-fourth of the original Internet price, to adjust the price to the store's general price level and image. A field note illustrates the complexity of pricing:

> The products are priced by two women working in the store, and they decide the price for each piece of goods individually. For fashion, what matters are the brand of the goods (a more well-known brand is priced higher, while products from fast fashion brands are priced lower) and the material condition (a higher price if the product is in "new" condition). Lamps are priced based on Internet searches where they search for original prices and then set the price to 50–60% of the original price. Finally, art and paintings have no standardised price strategies and depend on the type. IKEA-art is 50% of its original price. (Field note, observation in fashion and interior store, December 2019).

As illustrated, pricing practices and strategies specific to product categories were common. This standardised the pricing, and these "rules of thumb" became valuation devices in their own right.

In contrast, stores that remade donated goods used workload as a valuation device to estimate the price. Still, the estimation was a balance of several registers of valuing translated into monetary value. Here, the cost of the work put into remaking was discussed, but could not (solely) be used to set the price. Instead, an estimation of how much local consumers were willing to pay calibrated the pricing.

Also, prices were subject to change. Prices could be reduced to stimulate sales. When it became apparent that set prices did not align with the valuation consumers performed, lowered prices were a way to increase sales. Similarly, prices were negotiated when consumers asked for price reductions or bundle prices.

In summary, pricing is performed at several sites and occasions during the valuation process. Pricing involves multiple devices, tangible (such as online sites) and intangible (such as rules of thumb). And while pricing relies on a single register of valuing – that of monetary value – the monetary evaluations are connected to and reliant on numerous other registers.

4.2.4 Marketing: framing goods as usable and valuable. An essential function of ReTuna is – as in any mall – the marketing of goods. This included the organising of display arrangements, providing in-store service and arranging various mall events to attract consumers' attention and add value to second-hand goods.

In the mall's public areas, effort was put into framing the consumption of second-hand goods as a mode of sustainable consumption. For example, several signs and exhibitions informed visitors about the benefits of the CE and, more specifically, how ReTuna enabled consumers to move towards more circular consumption. Digital and on-site guided tours were organised to inform about the mall and promote the benefits of consuming second-hand goods. Here, the mall was turned into a valuation device valorising second-hand goods. Social media was also used to frame the mall and the goods as environmentally and socially sustainable. A typical example is this Facebook post:

> ReTuna recycling Mall.
>
> You make a difference! When you donate items you no longer want to ReTuna, you are both helping the environment and our small in-house business. These businesses create employment, contribute to the economy, and increase tourism in our municipality (in addition to saving the planet, of course, ☺). In the coming weeks, we will present our stores in more detail. How they work, upcycle, and add value to our waste [.....] Thank you for donating your stuff to us and understanding the value of buying reused products. Together, we make a difference! (Translated post from ReTuna Facebook page, 16th March 2020).

The mall's public places and the stores were important valuation devices. The mall's public areas were decorated with various types of reused goods. These items doubled as marketing devices, giving the mall specific visual characteristics (Figure 2), and showing consumers what could be done with used goods. Moreover, in-store signage, posters, banners and digital screens framed second-hand shopping as reducing consumers' carbon footprint and improving local employment. Here, social and environmental values were linked to economic values in a win-win story of circularity (Ariztia and Araneda, 2022).

In addition, staging second-hand products in-store added value by connecting them to particular social settings or uses (see also Fuentes, 2015; Hamilton and A. Wagner, 2014). For example, second-hand goods were placed and choreographed into idealised consumption scenes: dressed mannequins showed a combination of clothes or a table grouped with textiles, plates, decorations and accessories formed a dinner.

Finally, the mall organised events framing second-hand goods' consumption as a key component of the CE, for example, do-it-yourself redesign courses, handicraft meetings, toys or clothes swaps, sustainable movie nights, fairs and sustainability festivals. Such events were arranged to capture consumers' attention, valorise second-hand goods by connecting them to sustainability and educate consumers on how to be circular. The events turned the mall into a valuation site and device that indirectly valorised second-hand goods by framing them as part of a broader, assumingly desirable mode of circular/sustainable consumption.

The marketing of second-hand goods thus involves several practices aiming at valorising the second-hand goods on display. Like the other sets of valuation practices, this includes several devices, such as signs, social media platforms and display arrangements, and requires knowledgeable workers.

4.2.5 Valuation complexity and the issue of coordination. The valuation practices performed at ReTuna were interlinked and mutually shaping, forming trajectories of production processes akin to factory assembly lines, where raw material is sorted, modified, priced and marketed before being sold. Applying a valuation perspective brings to the fore the productive aspects of second-hand retailing. Our analysis shows that sorting, modifying, pricing and marketing used items play a key role in materially-semiotically making second-hand goods. Different kinds of values are assessed, negotiated, constructed and contested. These practices evaluate and valorise goods and, in so doing, change the ontology of these
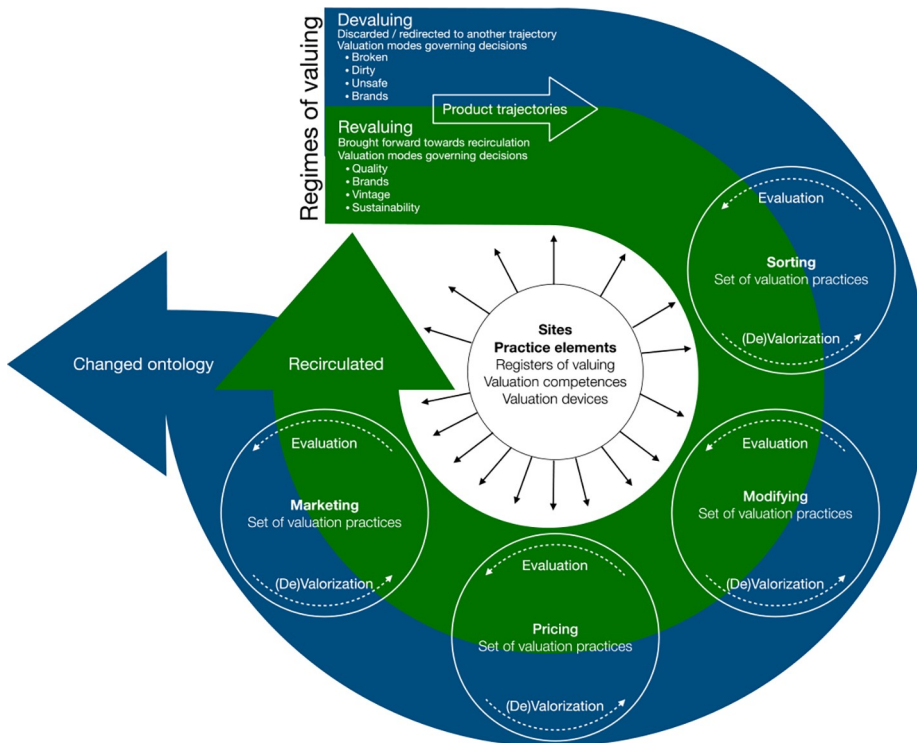
Figure 2. Production of second-hand goods – revaluation in practice
Source: Authors' own work

items from donated goods with potential to valuable second-hand goods (or, conversely, waste). Valuation is thus both productive of these practices and a product of them.

However, taking a valuation perspective and focusing on the involved set of practices also brings the complexity of second-hand retail to the fore. Our analysis shows that while valorising donated goods was, at times and under specific conditions, accomplished at ReTuna, this was a complicated process. Not only are there multiple and partly overlapping sets of practices involved in the valuation of second-hand goods, but each set of practices – sorting, modifying, pricing and marketing – involves various valuation devices, workers and registers. This is problematic both because of the plurality of valuation elements and their heterogeneous character. For example, when moving across sites, the items encounter multiple valuing registers as they go from donated goods to second-hand goods. As a result, what is valued in one site might not be valued in the next, and it is then sorted out.

Similarly, knowledge and know-how of the workers involved in the valuation process can differ both within and across sites. This is partly because second-hand workers are often part of work training programmes. They seldom have a background in either retail or second-hand. Therefore, these workers lack the necessary know-how to evaluate and valorise second-hand goods.

To complicate matters further, having similar levels of knowledge regarding second-hand products does not guarantee alignment. Valuations made by one knowledgeable actor could

be contested by another knowledgeable actor. For example, at ReTuna, two shop owners selling the same category of products – furniture – had very different approaches to the furniture's valorisation. While one opted for painting the pre-owned furniture white to increase its value, the other retailer questioned this mode of valorising as it did not, in her view, constitute a proper redesign practice.

Finally, we also have many heterogeneous valuation devices in play. While there were a few standardising valuation devices at work, such as sorting lists, these were few and far between. That is to say, one can note a lack of supporting valuation devices. As previous studies have clearly shown, materialisation is often key to stabilising processes (Star and Ruhleder, 1996).

These coordination problems would make the organisation of second-hand retail impossible were it not for the development and emergence of regimes of valuing, supporting and governing the valuation process across practices. While these regimes of valuing only partly solve the coordination problems observed at ReTuna, the revaluation of second-hand goods is accomplished because of their coordinating effect. We turn to this issue next.

4.3 Regimes of valuing at ReTuna

As previously stated, a regime of valuing is a general approach that governs multiple valuation practices, aligning them towards a common goal. As we will show, these complex arrangements involve and interconnect multiple and varied modes of valuing.

In the case of ReTuna, we argue that two complementary regimes of valuing organised the multiple valuation practices enacted: one focused on devaluation and one on the revaluation of goods. The regimes of valuing were observed across practices, supporting and governing the valuation processes of ReTuna and thus partly resolving some of the coordination problems discussed in the previous section.

4.3.1 Devaluation regime: broken, dirty, unsafe materials and brands. The devaluation of donated items was key in second-hand production, and multiple valuing modes were involved in devaluing and discarding them. These modes of valuing were necessary to manage the large inflow of used items. More items were donated than could be sold; only 3% to 10% of donated items were sold as second-hand products at ReTuna. Devaluation is therefore productive as it ensures that limited resources are allocated to items that could become valuable second-hand goods.

At ReTuna, there were various modes of devaluation at work. For example, as discussed previously, donated items were rejected because they were considered contaminated or unsafe. Items that were wet and at risk of mould, unhygienic products such as pillows, mattresses and bed cores, or those containing unknown chemicals (such as clothes stained with paint) were discarded. These registers of valuing were binary: used goods were either safe or unsafe, contaminated or clean, thereby simplifying devaluation. Hence, these registers of valuing left little room for the staff's interpretation of items' status. The evaluations and their subsequent devalorising drew on and interconnected the competencies of staff about local rules for sorting and work environment safety regulations. The work environment safety regulations guided how specific types of material had to be handled, such as unknown liquids. The established rules and work environment/waste management regulations were communicated to sorters through internal education and sorting lists.

Donated items were also devalued and discarded because they were dirty. However, in this case, the outcome could differ. Donated items found to be dirty were not automatically discarded. In some cases, they were instead found to be valuable enough to be cleaned and washed, while other times, dirtiness was enough to discard a product, turning it into waste or recyclable material. Understanding the specific requirements of a store, such as the

assortment profile, significantly influenced how an item's dirtiness level was perceived. Additionally, factors such as available equipment and infrastructure, washing machines or cleaning facilities were crucial in determining the appropriate action for dealing with a dirty item. Furthermore, the knowledge and expertise of the sorter regarding the potential uses and treatments for the materials in an item were essential factors guiding their decisions.

Finally, donated items were devalued and discarded based on their brands. Some brands were seen as less valuable and therefore "unsellable". Brands like Dressman (a Swedish low-end clothing brand) and IKEA were discarded because of their inexpensive nature and perceived low quality. They were not regarded as having the potential to become valuable second-hand products. This register of valuing (low price/quality brands) had the advantage of being easily applicable, routinely leading to discarding these products with little effort involved. In this work, brands, the store profile, the assortment, and the individual sorter's market insights into what is sought-after by customers were essential devices and competencies.

As we have tried to show, these modes of devaluing interconnect one or more registers of valuing with a specific configuration of valuation devices and competencies to support a consistent and routinised evaluation and valorisation of donated items. These arrangements are aligned into a regime of valuing, focused on the end goal of sorting out donated items not suitable for revaluation. The regime of devaluation enables the routinised devaluing of goods, resolving coordination problems and making the valuation work easier and more time efficient.

4.3.2 Revaluation regime: brands, vintage, quality and sustainability. The valuation modes that form part of the revaluation regime were also varied. Donated items were, for example, revalued based on their brands. Just as there were brands not deemed valuable enough to sell, certain brands were considered particularly valuable and governed not only what donated items to sell but also the pricing and marketing of these. For example, Swedish fashion brands from the sixties and seventies were seen as particularly valuable, and ceramic figurines from certain brands were sold at higher prices than other figurines. Brands thus served as both devaluation and revaluation devices. In these cases, it was important that staff knew about brands and applied the same register of valuing. In some cases, this was accomplished by developing valuation devices to standardise the revaluation mode. For example, sorting guides with photos showing brands and product types were considered valuable. Through these lists and illustrations, the competence was delegated to the device. Staff no longer needed to be knowledgeable regarding brands but could instead rely on the device to support the evaluation of the goods.

Products at ReTuna were also commonly revalued based on their "innovative" quality, that is, how creatively they were or could be modified. As discussed previously, items were chosen because of their redesign potential, modified under the expectation that this would add value to them, priced following the same logic, and marketed to accentuate the qualities resulting from the redesign. This mode of revaluing spanned across valuation practices and involved various devices. However, above all, this mode of revaluation relied heavily on staff competence. Knowledge and skill were necessary to valorise these items and turn donated items with potential into redesigned products valued for their originality. For example, the owner of the florist store was an educated florist and had worked as a gardener, specialising in creating creative decorations. Similarly, the owner of the vintage furniture store was an educated blacksmith and carpenter. Both had in-depth product knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of how used goods could be redesigned.

Conversely, goods were also revalued because of their vintage quality. Here, the goods were not chosen because of the new qualities they acquired but based on how well they

preserved old styles and aesthetics. Not all old items are considered vintage; typically, they must have a particular design and be associated with a specific time period. One store owner described how she sought high-quality fashion from the seventies or earlier to sell them as vintage. In doing this, she emphasised avoiding relying solely on her taste or idea of what constituted a beautiful garment. Instead, she focused on identifying garments from the appropriate period. In this example, it is also clear that the enactment of modes of valuing at times required the rejection of competing registers of valuing (good taste and aesthetics). Still, it could also involve efforts to "objectify" evaluations.

Goods were also revalued based on their sustainability potential. Framing second-hand products as part of the CE made them valuable in new ways. Likewise, connecting second-hand products to environmental benefits due to reduced material usage made all second-hand products potentially valuable. Finally, second-hand products at ReTuna were also connected to societal issues by being linked to both charity work and work training programmes. Marketing devices and sustainability/circularity discourses were key devices in accomplishing this, but also competencies regarding product material and environmental impact were key in choosing which items could be resold with a sustainability argument.

Finally, donated items were revalued based on their perceived "quality". The quality revaluation mode emphasised the material or design of the goods. Products deemed to be of high quality were viewed as possessing longevity and, therefore, considered valuable. For instance, the owner of a vintage furniture store described selecting and refurbishing old tables and chests of drawers because their material qualities allowed them to be rescued and restored.

In all the revaluation modes, the idea of the consumer was key. While flesh-and-blood consumers are not actively involved in these devaluation/revaluation modes, the ideas of consumers and their demands shape these processes. What brands are seen as valuable, the relevance of vintage or the importance of quality, for example, are all evaluated with an idea of a consumer or set of consumers in mind.

5. Discussion and conclusions

We have in this paper taken an interest in the empirically overlooked and under-theorised processes of (re)valuation that make the recirculation of products possible. We set out to understand the socio-material mechanism behind the recirculation of products by investigating how and under what conditions donated goods are transformed from discarded and devalued goods to valuable, exchangeable second-hand products. Valuation processes, while crucial to both the CE in general and second-hand markets in particular, have received scant scholarly attention. Against this background, our aim in this paper has been to contribute to the literature on the CE by empirically exploring and theorising the valuation of second-hand goods.

Below, we will summarise the results of our analysis and discuss how these results contribute to previous research on the CE. This is followed by a more practical discussion of the implications of these results for practitioners. Finally, we end the paper by drawing out some possible lines of inquiry for future research.

5.1 Summary of findings

This research has shown how second-hand products are "produced" as a result of complex valuation processes. The valuation of second-hand items, we showed, is accomplished through multiple sets of sorting, modifying, pricing and marketing practices. These practices are all valuation practices in the sense that they include the evaluation and devalorising/revalorising of donated items. These valuation practices were furthermore guided by

registers of valuing and drew on and depended on valuation devices and valuation competence that often supported the evaluation and devalorisation/revalorisation of the second-hand items.

However, the valuation of second-hand products is complicated by the heterogeneous character of the goods involved and, at ReTuna, also the heterogeneous character of the actors and devices involved and the sheer scale of the operation. This heterogeneity creates coordination problems that would have made the organisation of this second-hand market impossible were it not for the development and emergence of regimes of valuing, supporting and governing the valuation process across practices and providing much-needed stability.

Figure 2 outlines the dynamic process of revaluation. As the figure shows, the production of second-hand goods and subsequent recirculation are dependent on both devaluation and revaluation.

To determine what items can be turned into valuable second-hand goods, the process of valuation has to include both the devaluing and revaluing of items, each of these guided by specific registers of valuing and supported by valuation devices and competences. The sorting out of items saves time and effort, simplifying the revaluation process. Similarly, items are also sorted in, moved along in the process of revaluation when they align with the relevant modes of (re)valuing. Consequently, the modes of valuing included in the devaluation and revaluation regime determine what kind of items become second-hand products, how they are valorised, and, ultimately, what counts as a valuable second-hand product. These interconnected regimes of valuing support and govern across valuation practices, aligning multiple arrangements of registers of valuing, valuation competence and devices in ways that routinise, to some extent, the sorting, modifying, pricing and marketing of heterogeneous donated items. Products were both mobilised and transformed in their trajectory through these valuations. Depending on the qualities that they were ascribed in the processes, the items were either devalued or revalued.

5.2 Theoretical contributions

Our analysis contributes to CE research by introducing and developing a practice theory approach to valuation that helps us to understand the processes involved in the recirculation of used goods. While CE research has often studied and discussed circular business models or policy initiatives, these studies have seldom examined the specific social, cultural and material processes that make the implementation of these modes possible. While these studies often identify the types of business models or circular activities required, they seldom provide an understanding of the social processes involved in making circularity possible. The practical accomplishment of the CE is often left unexplored and unexplained.

Addressing this shortage, our practice theory approach to valuation allowed us to focus on the nitty-gritty details and uncover what is involved behind the neatly packaged sustainable or circular models often promoted by practitioners and academics. As our study shows, going from metaphors of circularity, claims of regenerative systems, and calls to "close the loop" (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017) to accomplish the practical recirculation of goods is difficult. It involves more than merely identifying "barriers" and developing strategies to overcome them. Arranging and coordinating the valuation of goods is demanding. Moreover, existing efforts to promote circularity, such as ReTuna, often come with built-in tensions and rest on fragile arrangements (see also, Ariztia and Araneda, 2022). This tells us that we need to scrutinise the promises of the CE critically (see also, Corvellec et al., 2022).

More specifically, our practice theory approach to valuation allowed us to shift focus from values to the process of valuation and to reinterpret disposal practices and the second-hand retailing of used goods as valuation practices. It also allowed us to make new connections.

The practice theory approach to valuation we outlined worked, therefore, as an enabling theory, providing us with the necessary vocabulary to shed light on the hitherto neglected processes of valuation involved in the recirculation of products on second-hand markets. It allowed us to treat the disposal, retailing, and consumption of second-hand goods as part of the same valuation processes involving various valuation workers, devices and sites using diverse registers of value.

We furthermore argue that this shift, from the analysis of discrete practices to processes of interconnected valuation, is key if we are to understand the recirculation of products so central to the CE programme. As Greeson (2020) suggests, each moment of valuation is shaped by preceding and subsequent valuation processes, making it crucial to explore how valuation unfolds across sites and practices. To comprehend the mechanisms driving product recirculation, we must move beyond the conventional divisions of economic activity and trace valuation processes across production, distribution and consumption – and back again. This broader perspective allows us to see how products and materials gain, lose and regain value throughout their lifecycle.

Consequently, while our analysis has shed light on the role of retailing practices in the revaluation of products, thereby also drawing attention to an often-ignored area in discussions of the CE, the valuation approach developed can be applied more broadly. We suggest that processes of revaluation are also involved when, for example, turning once discarded food into valuable products, when refurbishing smartphones or when recycling plastics. All recirculation of products and materials involves processes of revaluation where these items are evaluated and valorised, typically in long chains of valuation involving multiple practices, devices and competences. Taking a valuation approach can help us uncover the complex socio-material processes involved in the recirculation of products and materials, involved in making previously discarded items valuable again. It will also inevitably lead to a discussion of the difficulties of accomplishing circular economies. As our study has illustrated, once we move beyond slogans and metaphors, and examine more closely what is involved in accomplishing circularity, we are forced to face the complexities of what are often heterogeneous sets of actors, devices and products/materials as well as complicated material and economic processes.

However, it does not mean that all efforts to perform more circular economies will inevitably fail, only that their performance is challenging. What is needed, perhaps, is a more modest and well-informed approach to the assembling of circular economies (Corvellec et al., 2022). It is an approach that tempers the promises of the CE and does not deny or reduce the complexity involved but acknowledges and explores it. One way of doing this, we suggest, is by investigating the underlying process of valuation central to the recirculation of goods.

5.3 Managerial implications

Insights into the revaluation processes at ReTuna also help us understand how to better organise revaluation for recirculation in other contexts. Based on our analysis, processes of recirculation are underlined by processes of valuation, which, in turn, are complex and fraught with failure. In line with this, our analysis shows the importance of *mapping*, *standardising*, *coordinating* and *infrastructuring* processes of revaluation.

Firstly, taking a valuation approach means acknowledging that items gain or lose their value in practices of valuation where they are evaluated and (de)valorised. Therefore, key to designing working processes of revaluation is understanding current valuations. Going back and forth in the value chain and trying to understand how materials and products are valued in production, distribution, use and disposal is crucial to understanding how to change or

relate to existing valuation processes. The mapping of valuation will tell you how/if you need to tweak or reorganise the valuation practices that you are responsible for.

Secondly, in many cases, one can assume that such a mapping will also reveal a great deal of heterogeneity. In the case of ReTuna, we showed that at least part of these problems is due to the difficulties in standardising and coordinating the processes of valuation. This has also been shown by other studies of second-hand (e.g. Greeson, 2020; Hedegård, Gustafsson and Paras, 2020). Our study, therefore, shows the importance of not just mapping and being aware of valuation processes but also working deliberately to standardise them to facilitate the routinisation of the necessary devaluations/revaluations. While ReTuna already did this to some extent, much could be gained by thinking more strategically about how desirable modes of valuing could be made possible and standardised across practices by developing and aligning the necessary valuation elements.

Thirdly, not only heterogeneity but also complexity – that is, a multitude of interconnecting and not easily predictable components – characterised revaluation at ReTuna. To streamline revaluation, sorters, store owners and mall managers need better coordination. Efforts to establish processes of revaluation thus depend on the organisational capabilities of the actors involved. In the future, technological tracking systems (like digital product passes) could perhaps ensure that valuation practices across production, distribution, consumption and recycling are coordinated to enable recirculation.

Finally, the inherent complexity of revaluing materials and products highlights the need for infrastructuring. That is, what is required are broad agreements and the development, maintenance and integration of infrastructures that support this process. Effective revaluation requires interconnected social, technical and economic arrangements that link the diverse actors and practices necessary for making revaluation – and ultimately recirculation – possible. This underscores the importance of active involvement from trade organisations, non-governmental organizations and governmental agencies in facilitating and enabling revaluation processes that drive the CE forward. Circularity can only be accomplished collectively.

5.4 Limitations and future research

The study has three key limitations that future research could address. Firstly, it does not examine the role of consumers in the evaluation and valorisation of second-hand goods or their responses to retailers' valuation efforts. As a result, the study does not assess the effectiveness of the identified valuation practices, nor does it capture the full cycle of recirculation from disinvestment to consumption. To address this limitation, future research could examine the continuity of the valuation process by tracing second-hand goods as they integrate into consumers' everyday lives. Here, the resources of practice theory could also be useful in exploring how second-hand goods are (re)valued within the complex nexus of household practices (see, e.g. Greene and Hobson, 2025; Myriam Åberg and Greene, 2025).

Secondly, the study is limited to Sweden, an affluent society in which the consumption of second-hand products has been largely normalised (Persson and Hinton, 2023). These contextual factors may influence second-hand retail differently than in other settings. For example, Williams and Paddock (2003) suggest that economic necessity primarily drives second-hand consumption among lower-income groups, highlighting the importance of exploring diverse interpretations of second-hand practices across different populations. Additionally, studies conducted in other countries have highlighted the stigmatisation of second-hand consumption (Valor, Ronda and Abril, 2022). These differences are likely to shape the valuation processes involved in second-hand retailing and consumption, and

studies in other cultural and economic contexts would therefore be valuable for extending (or challenging) the valuation approach to recirculation developed in this paper.

Thirdly, this study examines second-hand products, and to a large extent, clothes and textiles. Other product categories, such as electronics, furniture or cars, would likely involve different processes of valuation. These areas are connected to and supported by specific sets of valuation registers, devices and competences. They may also be governed by different regimes of valuing. Therefore, explorations of these areas would be valuable to develop the theoretical generalisation of the valuation approach developed in this paper.

Notes

[1.] For literature reviews of circular economy research, see Rabiu and Jaeger-Erben (2022) or Merli, Preziosi and Acampora (2018).

[2.] A folk high school is an independent non-formal adult education institution primarily found in the Nordic countries. It focuses on civic education and personal development rather than formal qualifications.

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417

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Corresponding author
Christian Fuentes can be contacted at: christian.fuentes@ism.lu.se

Appendix

Table A1. General interview guide

Theme	Main questions	Example of follow-up
The individual	What is your role in relation to ReTuna/the store/the department?	Background/previous experience?
		What works well/not well? What could be done differently? What experiences have you gained?
The mall/store	How did the store start, and what was its purpose?	What preparations were made?
	How is the store organised?	What goals do you have?
	How does your store compare to others?	Who and what is involved in organising the store?
	How does collaboration within ReTuna work?	What support do you receive?
		Do you collaborate with anyone, internally and externally? What are the rental arrangements?
Customers	How would you describe your customers?	Who is/do you want as customers?
		How do you communicate with them? How do customers behave in the store?
Used goods handling	How do you work with donated goods?	How is sorting handled at the facility?
	Can you describe the process?	Do you repair or redesign goods?
	Are there items that are not sold/re-circulated?	What happens to unsold items?
		Do you use any tools/support sort, develop or price items? Do you have fixed times for removing items? What is disposed of? What happens to goods that is not accepted?
Marketing/communication	How do you work with marketing and communication?	Which channels do you use?
		What is the goal of your communication? What response have you received? Visual merchandising/store strategy?
Sustainability	What does sustainability mean to you?	In what ways is your business sustainable?
		How do you measure sustainability? How are different dimensions of sustainability reflected?
Follow-up (for repeat interviews)	What has changed since last time?	How has the store developed?
		Business model/concept? Sales? Products? Customers? Events? Visual merchandising? ReTuna as a mall?

Source(s): Authors' own work