

**Towards sustainable consumption: factors influencing  
divestment in clothing, furniture and mobile phones**

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## **Declaration**

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own, except where work which has formed part of jointly-authored publications has been included. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## **Abstract**

Existing research has shown how contemporary patterns of consumption have become a major constraint to achieve sustainability. Due to the potential that the end-of-life of durable goods has for optimising consumption cycles, this thesis aims to contribute to the discussion by investigating the divestment process and its elements. Divestment refers to the moment when material possessions fall into disuse and a physical or emotional separation between owners and their possessions occurs.

This study investigates divestment as a social practice, in order to situate it in the consumer culture as a sociohistorical setting. To this end, two different countries were selected for comparison: Mexico and the United Kingdom, in order to highlight how culture can influence the divestment process. Three different products were selected (clothing, furniture and mobile phones) and a mixed methods approach was used to investigate the divestment process and its constituent elements. The quantitative stage identified different consumers profiles from which interviewees for the qualitative strand were selected.

Findings illustrate that divestment is a complex multi-layered process that is shaped by four main factors: the contextual factors, the situational factors, the sociohistorical factors, and the material agency. The study identified similarities in the channels used for divestment in both countries. However, differences were found in the frequency in which channels and the negotiations for using them occur. The negotiation of divestment outcomes seems to be a balance of intellectual and physical efforts that the owner needs to dedicate towards the divestment. These efforts are contextually mediated and have an impact on the preferred channels of divestment.

Finally, this thesis discusses the implications of findings of the study for the design disciplines. Conclusions also suggest that a culturally-informed perspective on divestment can generate a more effective agenda for the recirculation of materials and products towards more sustainable ways of consumption.

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## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Practices around consumption have been subject of analysis in the last decades since an extensive body of research has shown how contemporary patterns of consumption are contributing to the rapid degradation of the environment, endangering ecological systems and compromising the possibility of maintaining wellbeing (UNEP, 2010; Fischer-Kowalski et al., 2011; United Nations, 2015). Human production and consumption activities are having great impact on the environment, causing issues such as resources depletion and waste generation. For instance, material extraction and consumption has doubled since 1980 (OECD, 2015b, p. 9). In addition, waste generation has increased fast, with a tendency to continue increasing globally up to 20% until the year 2100 (International Solid Waste Association, 2014, p. 6). Together, these studies illustrate how consumption patterns become a constraint for achieving more sustainable societies.

Within the consumption spectrum, the replacement and disposal of material goods have become a key issue since data on consumption show an increase in acquisition of durable goods. In the United Kingdom, for example, the consumption of durable items such as clothing, furniture, appliances, tools and technological devices has grown 27.6% from 2009 to 2018 (OECD, 2019). Durable goods consumption is also growing steadily in the euro area (European Central Bank, 2015, p. 19) Furthermore, the high replaceability of items becomes a major challenge for sustainability because products that are still functional are replaced; consumers want to have the newest item available (Campbell, 1992; Cooper, 2005, cited in Cooper, 2010b, p. 5). These dynamics in our times have given our society the adjective of a throwaway culture (Hellmann and Luedicke, 2018).

Given the potential that optimising the life of products can have for promoting more sustainable ways of consumption, a considerable amount of studies has sought to identify factors that can reduce the environmental impact of products throughout their lifespans with the aim of outweighing harms associated with material goods consumption (see Cooper, 2010a; Chapman, 2017; Egenhoefer, 2018 for extensive reviews on this matter). In that literature, the consumption, use and disposal of material goods has occupied a central role since several authors have demonstrated the

importance of consumption in terms of the environmental impact that products can have.

Studies on lifespan of products have provided information on how to reduce the impact of consumption. Some studies have focused on techno-centric solutions, supporting the transformation of production systems, by reducing the impact of both processes and materials and promoting a green growth (Bina, 2013, p. 1024). Some other strategies have centred on understanding factors that affect products' lifespan (Cooper, 2010a), aiming to extend the use of goods and prevent an early disposal by endorsing an emotional attachment between users and objects (Chapman, 2005) and by attempting to slow down the consumption cycles (Strauss and Fuad-Luke, 2008). These studies have made significant contributions in the consumption field. However less attention has been given to the stage in which products stop being used and owners discard them. Much uncertainty still exists about the ways in which people get rid of their material possessions and the factors that configure these practices. Nevertheless, the moment in which durable goods stop being used or are being discarded is a crucial moment for creating new strategies that contribute to sustainable consumption goals.

For all the above mentioned, a great potential for optimising consumption cycles is perceived in the *end-of-life* or *disposal* stage of products, because it is in this moment that products can enter into the waste stream despite the fact that some value can still be recovered from them. If, instead of considering consumers as the end point in the distribution process, they are positioned as a pivot in the disposition channel (Harrell and McConocha, 1992, p. 399), new opportunities can be found for reducing waste and facilitate the recirculation of goods.

This study aims to examine the topic of consumerism in contemporary societies from a specific point of view: divestment. This concept has been recently coined to refer to the moment in which material possessions fall into disuse; it involves "the separation of people from their things" (Gregson et al., 2007b). This study suggests that divestment is potentially linked to acquisition and replacement of goods, as well as to waste generation. Hence, a more comprehensive understanding of the divestment process can have implications for resources usage optimisation and an improved waste management.

The thesis presents an investigation of the process of divestment and its elements, in order to identify ways to contribute to sustainable consumption goals. To this end, the results of a study in which divestment practices were explored in two geographical locations, Mexico and the United Kingdom, are reported. First, different

profiles of consumers are investigated with quantitative tools through their attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable consumption to set the background for exploring individual aspects in the divestment process. Second, a qualitative stage explores in-depth the experiences of participants in the divestment process in order to identify which factors configure the divestment practices and how.

By analysing the divestment practices in two different countries, the investigation aims to highlight how factors such as environment and culture configure the divestment practice. This represents an opportunity since this topic has received limited attention in the literature. Whilst studies on the lifespan of products have generated knowledge about the individual and technical factors influencing the disposal of products, less attention has been paid to how different geographical and social contexts shape the divestment outcomes. Furthermore, the selection of two different countries offers the opportunity to explore the implications of any given setting for sustainable practices.

To investigate the divestment process, this study uses an integrative approach based primarily on theories of social practice. This approach accounts for individual and structural factors and how they interact to configure the divestment outcomes. This perspective recognises that consumers are a complex unit of study interacting within a sociocultural context and it acknowledges the fact that consumption of material goods is merged with other social practices and it has a central role for the configuration of contemporary lifestyles.

The study of the problem from the practice theory perspective allowed to understand the centrality of consumption for contemporary lifestyles and the intertwined links that it has with the acquisition and replacement of material possessions. This theoretical framework informed further decisions regarding the design of the research. From the intersections between consumption, sustainability and contemporary lifestyles, three different types of products were selected as units of observation: clothing, furniture and mobile phones. Even when these products seem to be distant in terms of functional and technical characteristics, they have a great potential to provide insight into the process of divestment in the context of consumer culture under the sustainable consumption frame.

This introductory chapter is divided in three sections. Section 1.1 describes the issues associated with sustainability and the consumption of durable goods, in particular the three units of observation. Section 1.2 explores the barriers for more efficient ways of divestment to position gaps found in the field of knowledge. Section 1.3

presents the research questions and the objectives. Finally, section 1.4 provides the thesis outline by describing briefly the contents of each chapter.

## **1.1 Sustainability and the consumption of durable goods**

Economic theory perceives consumption as a linear process and it considers that “every exchange of goods is beneficial for all parties involved” (Håkansson, 2014, p. 692). However, this perspective tends to overlook the impact of consumption in other spheres, such as the environmental and social ones, leading to a misconception of the effects of consumption activities.

As an alternative to linear models of consumption, sustainable consumption has positioned itself as a discourse that promotes the idea of “consuming differently, consuming efficiently, and having an improved quality of life (UNEP, 1999, cited in Jackson, 2006, p. 5). This implies the need to transform consumption and production activities through a sustainable management, by using more efficiently natural resources, but also by substantially reducing waste generation. In order to assist in the accomplishment of this objective, this study focuses on the impact of durable goods to find ways to challenge the linear consumption paradigm.

Nowadays, people frequently engage in consumption habits categorised as unsustainable for the reason that they require a large amount of resources and energy (Solér, 2018, p. 7). Durable goods such as automobiles, technological devices, clothing and furniture have become essential for contemporary ways of living, not only for their utilitarian aspect, but also for the social meanings that they enclose. With the increasing demand of these goods, technology and garment industries are currently leading the manufacturing sector (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2019). The continuous acquisition, replacement and disposal of durable goods have made contemporary patterns of consumption an unsustainable practice because, in addition to the large demand of resources and energy, it increases waste generation.

The three types of products selected as units of observation for the present study (clothing, furniture and mobile phones) reflect this global reality. For example, clothing consumption has roughly doubled in the last 15 years (Ellen McArthur Foundation, 2017, p. 18) whilst 30% of clothes in British wardrobes have not been used in the last year (Solér, 2018, p. 8). Correspondingly, fashion industry is responsible for 4% of global solid waste (Global Fashion Agenda & The Boston Consulting Group, 2017, p. 10).

The case of furniture represents an interesting category since, traditionally, furniture used to be a long-lasting product; however, with the transformation of consumption practices, it has been slowly becoming a fashionable type of good (Leslie and Reimer, 2003; Gibson et al., 2013), resulting in an increase on consumption numbers. In the UK, expenditure on furnishings, household equipment and maintenance grew by 17% from 2008 to 2015 (Solér, 2018, p. 8). These facts reveal the importance of analysing divestment practices through furniture.

Finally, the case of mobile phones is relevant in terms of waste generation and the demand of resources linked to their production (OECD, 2012; World Economic Forum, 2019). Globally, smartphone users increased by 40% from 2016 to 2019 (Statista, 2019). The high replaceability of these items also represents an issue for the environment. E-waste is now the fastest-growing waste stream in the world (World Economic Forum, 2019). As with the other two cases, mobile phones offer an opportunity to explore the end-of-life stage and how consumers engage with this practice.

In summary, all these facts show how these three types of durable goods represent important challenges for sustainability, not only because their demand keeps increasing but also for the way in which they are disposed. It is for this reason that this study is purposely focused on the process of divestment and the practices around them, in order to have a better understanding on how some value from unwanted items and materials can be recovered. Shifting the attention to the practice of divestment instead of the products helps to distance from the idea that features on products have a full control of possessions' longevity. Instead, the three units of observation allow to understand the implications that each category of product has for the divestment processes, in order to understand how the impact of these type of goods can be reduced at their *end-of-life* stage.

## **1.2 Barriers to sustainable ways of divestment**

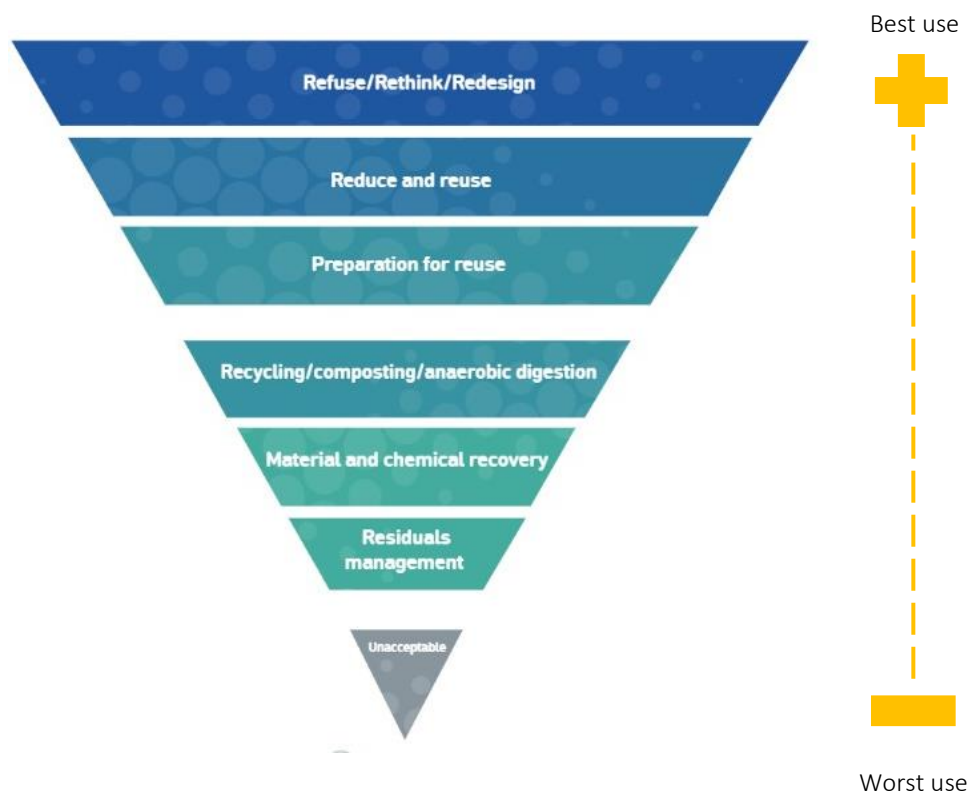
The discourse of sustainable consumption advocates for new and more efficient ways of managing resources and reducing waste generation (United Nations, 2015) throughout the different stages of the consumption process. One of the strategies to accomplish so is to promote the circularity of products and materials in order to reduce the demand of resources and the generation of waste.

Sustainable consumption research has diversified to understand micro and macro-level issues, systems of production and consumption, and the individual



components of sustainable ways of consuming (Reisch and Thøgersen, 2015, p. 13). The circularity of materials and products is an important strategy for sustainable consumption because it allows the reintegration of products and materials to the commercialisation channels, preventing that unused utility becomes waste. At the divestment stage, the opportunity to facilitate the circularity arises. It is at this moment that is possible to enable the unwanted items to be recirculated.

Although some strategies for waste diversion and waste management have been arising in the last decades, this research process is still in its early stages. The waste hierarchy (Figure 1.1) classifies the waste diversion actions according to their environmental impact, specifying that the most desirable activity towards waste reduction is the reuse of existing products, followed by activities that reprocess items to recover materials from them. Hence, to let materials arrive to landfills becomes the least desirable option.



**Figure 1.1.** Zero Waste Hierarchy.  
Source: Zero Waste Europe (2019).

More sustainable ways of divestment would involve promoting the recirculation of functional items (the most preferred option), the reuse of items components, the

recycling of materials and finally the appropriate containment of items and materials (the least preferred option). Even though these activities are hierarchically categorised and their environmental consequences are often considered, to implement the reduction of waste and recirculation of items and materials successfully has become a major challenge for sustainability. People have more knowledge about environmental issues (Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 119); still, the transformation of knowledge into practice is occurring very slowly.

Nowadays, even when some options for the disposal of the unwanted items are available, their acceptance and adoption have not been fully accomplished. For example, data show that the worldwide average of waste recycling is only 10.7% (Circle Economy Organisation, 2019). Correspondingly, only 20% of clothing is reused or recycled by the end of its life, whilst 80% ends up in landfills or incinerated. (Global Fashion Agenda & The Boston Consulting Group, 2017, p. 61). In a similar vein, only 20% of electronic waste is appropriately managed, the other 80% ends up in landfills or disposed by informal workers in poor conditions. (World Economic Forum, 2019). Overall, these studies highlight the need for developing more effective ways to recover items and materials in order to prevent that valuable resources end unconsumed.

### **1.2.1 Addressing gaps in the divestment studies**

Towards the end of their lifespans, material possessions have the potential to be less or more environmentally impactful. The previous section showed how more sustainable ways of divestment can reduce the impact that consumption of durable goods have on the environment, by slowing down the consumption loops to extend product lifetimes through different ways, and to increase utilisation either of items or their components (Tunn et al., 2019, p. 325). In this way, the implications of overconsumption would be reduced.

People engaging in consumption cycles, including the divestment stage, face different kinds of difficulties when they deal with unwanted items. The divestment stage of products is a relatively new topic and very little is known about which factors are involved in the divestment decisions. Some research in the field of sustainable consumption have identified gaps in terms of the implementation of policies or initiatives that are trying to encourage sustainable practices.

Studies on sustainability and consumption have been focusing mainly on the acquisition stage of goods until a few years back, when researchers have been gradually

moving from investigating the purchase phase to the full lifespan of material goods, including the end-of-life stage (Trentmann, 2012, p. 3). On the other hand, perspectives on consumption tended to develop from individualistic perspectives (Warde, 2017; Evans, 2019), studying consumption as a rational individual process overlooking the intertwined relationship that it has with contemporary lifestyles.

More recent studies have started to recognise the role that cultural practices have for sustainability. In particular, studies in the field of sustainable consumption have focused mainly in universal principles that overlook the relevance that social and cultural aspects have for the design and implementation of sustainable strategies. (Gibson et al., 2013; Lane and Gorman-Murray, 2011). That is to say that the universal meaning of sustainable practices can be challenged under this perspective, acknowledging that in different geographical contexts, sustainability can have different meanings and implications, which would imply different ways to implement it.

Hence, a more encompassing understanding of consumers' experiences in the divestment stage can find more suitable practices according to a particular sociocultural setting. Any given practice can vary according to different geographical context or their cultural meanings: "the context and culture in which consumption activities occur embraces a dynamic array of entities, processes, events, and rituals that drive or are driven by the phenomenon under investigation" (Nair and Little, 2016, p. 171); in this case, the practice of divestment.

So far, only a few studies have discussed divestment of material possessions (Harrell and McConocha, 1992; Gregson et al., 2007b; Glover, 2015) and they mostly overlooked what implications for sustainability can have to practice divestment in different environments. The nature of divestment still remains unclear. There is no consensus about which elements constitute the divestment process and the links that it might have with other stages in consumption: "to leave divestment untouched is, on the one hand, to leave unchallenged that consumption is predicated on the prior activity of divestment, or – in its stronger form – that divestment is foundational to contemporary levels of consumerism" (Gregson et al., 2007b, p. 187). By recognising that divestment practice is part of the consumption process, the topic becomes significant for the transformation of consumption patterns.

### **1.3 Research questions and objectives**

As described above, research in the field of lifespan and its implications on sustainable consumption has tended to focus in the production and acquisition stages, separating consumption from social practices and current lifestyles. As a consequence, little is known about the impact of post-acquisition stages of products and their implications for sustainable consumption, particularly the divestment stage.

Studying divestment can contribute to sustainable consumption for the reason that it has the potential to enable circularity of materials and products, and it can also support environmentally responsible ways of managing waste, aiming to recover materials or prevent a harmful disposal. Hence, by investigating the experiences of people while dealing with divestment it is possible to gain a better understanding of when the divestment point occurred, how people experience the moment of divestment and which types of divestment exist, which together constitute the process of divestment.

Current theories on divestment fail to capture the complexity of these intersections. Hence, studies on divestment can contribute to the field of sustainable consumption by understanding not only why goods are replaced and discarded, but also how the context and the culture provide the background for divestment practices. This thesis seeks to contribute to fill these knowledge gaps.

The present thesis addresses the broad topic of how and why divestment processes occur and what are the elements that configure it. It does so by following the subsequent specific questions:

- (1) What are the ways in which divestment is carried out?
- (2) How divestment practices are constituted?
- (3) How individual aspects influence the divestment?
- (4) How contextual factors shape divestment?

This research aims to investigate the divestment process and its elements in order to identify ways to contribute to sustainable consumption goals. To address that, divestment was studied in Mexico and the United Kingdom, according to the following objectives:

- (1) To identify and characterise the different divestment channels
- (2) To develop an integrative understanding of the divestment practice

- (3) To identify and characterise the contextual elements that shape divestment
- (4) To identify aspects that prevent or facilitate the improvement of practices of divestment according to sustainable consumption principles.

## **1.4 Thesis outline**

The present chapter (chapter 1) briefly introduced the relationship between sustainable consumption and divestment, by describing the environmental pressures that contemporary patterns of consumption have caused. This chapter explains why divestment becomes a potential moment of intervention where more sustainable ways of consuming can be developed.

Chapter 2 undertakes a review of studies on consumption with the aim of framing consumer culture as a sociohistorical setting as part of contemporary lifestyles. Social practice theory perspective is discussed with the aim of framing the research under this theoretical perspective to analyse factors that shape the practice of divestment in a context. The chapter introduces Mexico and the United Kingdom as countries that worked as cultural units for the study.

The methodological strategy is presented in chapter 3. It explains the main considerations for the research design by breaking down the epistemological approach, the methods and the main procedure of the research. Three types of material goods are presented as units of observation: clothing, furniture and mobile phones. The chapter follows by explaining the stages of the mixed-methods approach and finally it identifies some strengths and limitations of the research strategy.

Chapter 4 reports the results of the quantitative strand of the research in order to present an overall view of both cultural units. It presents the relevant results of the survey in relation to sustainable consumption. Chapter 5 shows the main findings of the qualitative strand of the study. It describes the practice of divestment and the channels through which this practice is carried out. Findings on contextual differences and similarities in the divestment practice are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 6 concludes by outlining the elements that constitute the divestment practice. It elaborates on the individual, the contextual and the material factors shaping the divestment process. It describes the implications that the research has for design disciplines. Finally, it identifies the limitations of the study and opportunities for further research.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter presents a review of the body of knowledge around consumption theories, sustainability and divestment. It exposes some of the challenges related to sustainable consumption and divestment in present times. It also frames consumption and divestment practices in the current consumer culture to understand their role in the development of a more sustainable society. Finally, this chapter also presents a review of theoretical perspectives that contributed to build the conceptual framework that guided this investigation.

### **2.1 Consumption. The concept & history**

Consumption is ubiquitous in modern societies. In recognition of the relevance that it has in our time, it has been described as “the vanguard of history” (Miller, 2005). The notion of consumption has been essential to understand other dimensions like current lifestyles and the culture of materiality in environmental and social changes. Different disciplines have researched the questions of why and how people consume. Even though it is conventionally assumed that consumption is exclusively a stage in which a specific good is acquired, instead, it can be understood as a multifactorial activity that has a central role in daily individual and social activities. To think about consumption as merely an act of exchange, or an economic transaction is an idea that gained popularity within the modern era; however, in contemporary societies it is no longer perceived exclusively as a process of satisfying basic needs (i.e. food, shelter) but also a matter of how these needs are commodified through complex sociocultural processes.

Modernity brought with it a paradigm shift in the way of producing and consuming goods and services. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, industrialisation was the commencement of transformations in everyday life for which consumption became a central element. Within the modern era, “self and group identities were increasingly being negotiated through consumption” (Sparke, 2013, p. 29). Hence, consumption habits changed not only in terms of the number of goods that were consumed but also in the way in which merchandise were acquired and how they were perceived and valued by people. With mass production, consumption habits and processes changed, transforming the world in an unprecedented way. This, in turn, gave

rise to a series of challenges that we face today. In the past four decades, the world has witnessed unparalleled increases in consumption numbers, which are linked to significance that this activity has for individuals' lifestyles. Consequently, the sociocultural practices started to merge with consumption, which in turn, transformed consumption in a subject that was relevant not only for markets and economic system but also other fields like environmental, sociological and cultural studies.

Thus, as consumption enables the construction of identities this has caused the act of consuming to no longer be perceived exclusively as a goods-money exchange. Consumption has turned into a "process of meaning construction that is intimately intertwined with the social and cultural understandings that the individual brings to each experience" (Miles, 2018, p. 24). Therefore, the notion of the sociality of consumption becomes central to understand why, in contemporary societies, people consume the way they do. The discussion turns now into a broader subject that links consumption, lifestyle creation, needs satisfaction and well-being since, it can be acknowledged that for any consumer, every act of consumption has implications that go beyond the mere act of acquiring a product. Therefore, for this study, consumption is relevant in three main ways:

- To know how practices of consumption are interconnected with everyday life activities.
- To understand how consumption is relevant for building identities and sociality through materiality.
- To identify the environmental and social issues associated with practices derived from consumption.

Consumption, then, can be defined as "a process whereby agents [consumers] engage in appropriation and appreciation, whether for utilitarian, expressive or contemplative purposes, of goods, services, performances, information or ambience... over which the agent has some degree of discretion" (Warde, 2005, p. 137). People act as consumption agents, and they, in conjunction with a sociocultural environment, are the elements that constitute the *consumption process*. This way of understanding consumption emphasises the need for understanding it as a set of performances strongly connected with cultural and societal conditions.

Even as consumption has gained importance in recent years, studies about goods and culture are not new. A body of knowledge has been built on understanding the relevance of material possessions in the social and cultural environment. It has been more than four decades since Douglas and Isherwood (2002) approached the modern

ways of consumption in their ground-breaking work that, from an anthropological perspective, established a proposal to comprehend culture and its links to consumption. In their study, Douglas and Isherwood referred to consumption as "the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape" (1978, cited in Lunt and Livingstone, 1992, p. 84). Another pioneering researcher in the field of consumption is Daniel Miller, who focuses on the connections between consumption, material culture and identity from a sociological perspective.

In general terms, consumption studies have grown into a complex field in which different disciplines have been involved. Fields like economics, psychology, anthropology, and more recently, environmental policies and human wellbeing studies have been concerned with understanding the act of consumption. Some interdisciplinary studies have also helped to advance the body of knowledge, as is the case of this study, which aims to explore consumption through a divestment lens framed it within a sociocultural approach.

### **2.1.1 Consumer culture as a sociohistorical setting**

Modernity played a major role in the process of consolidating consumption as a way of living (Slater, 1997; Julier, 2008; Sparke, 2013). Currently, consumption has gained such relevance that it has permeated every corner of social life and culture. For this reason, this particular period of history has been referred to as *the consumer culture* epoch, which can be better understood if observed from a historical perspective. To differentiate the role of consumption in modern and postmodern times, Bauman (2007) coined the concepts of *the society of producers* (for modernity) and the society of consumers (for postmodernity). During modernity, the societal model had values centred in the long term, with a preference for a managerial spirit of normative regulation, the division and coordination of labour, conformity to rules and preference for long-term security instead of the immediately consumed good. In postmodernity, "everyone needs to be, ought to be, must be a consumer-by-vocation" which would be improbable without a waste-disposal industry and a strong attraction for the now (Bauman, 2007). It is within this context that the present study sets out the research questions.

Consumer culture can be seen as a predetermined set of conditions in which humans exert their role as consumers. If culture is considered a "mental programming" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 12) that precedes human acts, then, consumption is part of the data

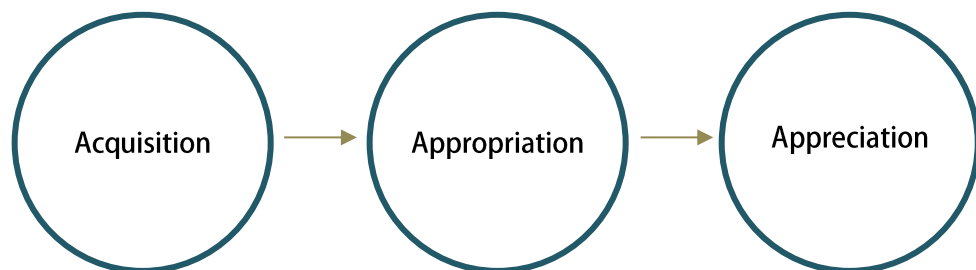


inserted in this mental programming of every consumer. Consumption as part of culture has great importance for understanding how people interact with certain societal forces in their consumption processes and how do they, as encultured *consumers*, shape them.

Theoretically, consumer culture can be defined as a homogeneous intangible space embedded in the global context which "does not recognise differences of age or gender... nor class distinctions... from the geographic centres of the worldwide network of information highways to its furthest, however impoverished peripheries" (Bauman, 2007, p. 55). As a category for this research, the conceptual background helps to better understand the conditions in which consumers are practising their processes of consumption as well as their processes of divestment.

Finally, the society of consumers is also distinguished by the fact that consumption is not necessarily linked to needs satisfaction; wants and preferences are also powerful drivers for consumption as consumers look for "novel and socially desirable products and services" (Solér, 2018, p. 5) that can be categorised as not essentially needed. It is also recognised that the complexity of consumption activities lies in the fact that it seems to be an activity that is essential for humans and, at the same time, it seems to be the root of a wide range of contemporary issues caused by our *overconsumption*.

The notion of consumption as an integral practice is fundamental for this research. Therefore, the act of consumption is not observed as merely the stage of acquisition of goods but a practice in which different moments are comprised. Acquisition, appropriation and appreciation have been classified by Warde (2005) as moments in the consumption process (Figure 2.1). Therefore, consumption does not refer exclusively to the act of purchasing or acquiring goods; it can be described instead, as a series of activities that involve different stages in the lifespans of material possessions.



**Figure 2.1.** Moments of consumption.  
Based on Warde (2005).

### **2.1.2 Explanatory theories of consumption: why and how people consume?**

Different perspectives have been developed to understand consumption in contemporary societies. Consumption, “if reduced to its archetypical form... is a permanent and irremovable condition and aspect of life” (Bauman, 2007, p. 25). However, since the transition to the postmodern society era, various issues emerged, demanding an explanation for the motivations for the rising consumption levels as well as the consequences of overconsumption. For this reason, different fields of knowledge have generated different theories for consumption. Questions around consumption deal with issues like the relationship of consumption activities and needs satisfaction, the (ir)rationality of consumers, the economic system and its role in consumption, the links between material possessions and wellbeing and the implications that the current consumption patterns have for sustainability.

In general terms, studies on consumption started as a practical discipline that aimed to understand the market and the behaviour of people as consumers. However, in the last few decades, consumption studies have evolved into a much more complex body of knowledge considered in a multi and interdisciplinary approach. Within these discussions, two main enquiries have been positioned as central: the process that drives consumption and the reasons why people consume. The first question can be labelled as the epistemological dimension of consumption, whilst the latter is related to the ontological one.

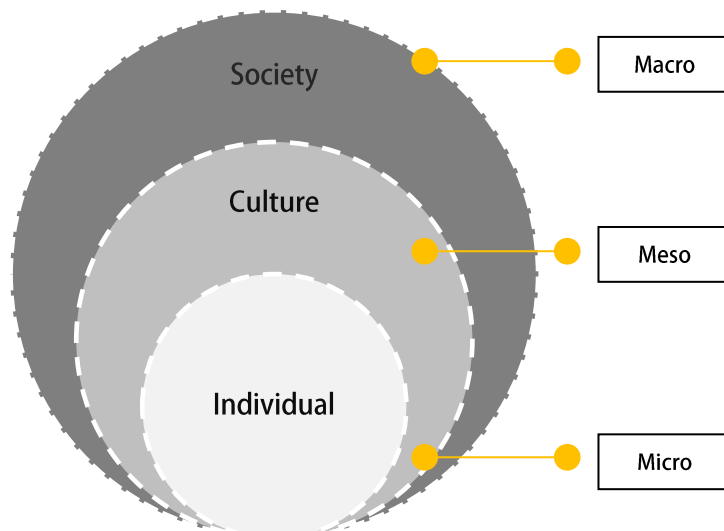
### **2.1.3 The epistemological dimension of consumption: how people consume?**

To date, different theoretical approaches have been developed in order to explain how consumption process is carried out. These perspectives can be classified according to their epistemological perspective. Epistemology can be defined as “the branch of philosophy concerned with how we know things” (Seale, 2018, p. 10). Hence, epistemological perspectives on consumption can be categorised according to the way in which they approach knowledge, ranging from the extreme behavioural approach to the more sociological one. Studies on consumption differ from each other in terms of how they classify the consumer motivations and their freedom when purchasing

something, the decision process, and the role of society and culture in consumption activities.

By understanding the current perspectives on consumer studies, it is possible to also understand the implications of their practical application. The body of knowledge on theories of consumption differ from one another in the way they examine the societal, the cultural and the individual dimensions and their relevance for the consumption process (Figure 2.2). They analyse the role of individuals, institutions, culture, markets and regulations in different ways. According to these variables, these approaches can be grouped into three different classes:

- Sociological approach which focuses on the macro and the meso level, and large-scale factors.
- Individualist approach which relates to the micro level and individuals as entities.
- Integrative approaches which incorporate social, cultural and individual aspects and their interactions in order to observe the relations between the society and the individuals.



**Figure 2.2** Epistemological dimensions of consumption studies.  
Source: Author's own based on Miller (2001); Warde (2005); Bauman (2007);  
Spaargaren (2011); Warde (2014) & Evans (2019).

The discussion about consumption is also frequently related to the freedom and autonomy debate in which it is discussed to what extent a person is guided by the context, the society, or even the instinctive impulses when making a purchase. The macro perspective agrees with the fact that structures in society induce specific social actions whilst the micro perspective claims that action is driven by rational and conscious individual decisions (Kirchberg, 2007, p. 123). Therefore, the degree of freedom, self-determination or autonomy granted to the consumer varies according to the perspective under which acts of consumption are analysed.

### **Sociological theories on consumption**

Sociological theories on consumption emphasise the role of social dynamics in the consumption process. The act of consuming under this perspective is strongly, if not totally, influenced by social forces called structures. Among these social forces are institutions, political powers, regulations and policies. These structures compel "individuals to act according to societal-level considerations" (Kirchberg, 2007, p. 116), instead of seeing consumers as rational individuals that act according to personal considerations, which would be the case for individualist perspectives on consumption. Among other interests of structural perspectives on consumption, it can be identified the way in which the economic system works and how it determines marketplace dynamics. Another key aspect in this paradigm is the role of class, gender and ethnicity in consumption activity which are also parts of structures in society.

In addition, elements like race, ethnicity, subculture and social class can be considered as "stable structural factors influencing consumers' behaviours" (Arnould and Thompson, 2018, p. 13) hence, they have the potential to shape consumer behaviours. Theorists like Veblen and his theory of *Leisure class* (1899) or Bauman's analysis of the consumerist society (2007) are examples of how social theories examine consumption. Another example of the sociological perspectives on consumption is the work of Adorno and Horkheimer (2000, cited in Stillerman, 2015, p. 13) who exposed the idea that advertisement and production systems create false needs with the purpose of generating new products or services for misleading people into consuming them, constraining the consumers' freedom.

Sociological approaches to consumption define consumers as *homo sociologicus* agents. This means that structures and social norms guide in a strong way the individual acts (Kirchberg, 2007, p. 116); therefore, the roots of consumption may be found in social factors. Hence, following this logic, the role of social processes must be

acknowledged in order to promote a change (Briceno and Stagl, 2006, p. 1542). In general terms, this type of discourses seem to designate a passive role for consumers “whose acts are largely the product of multiple framings” (Kravets et al., 2018, p. 51). In other words, the capacity for making decisions is perceived as strongly restricted since the social pressures are stronger than the freedom for acting.

### **Individualist approach to consumption**

There is a large scholar tradition, especially coming from behavioural economics and cognitive psychology studies that supports the notion of consumption as a matter of an individual decision making process. Within this perspective, agency, which is defined as the freedom of directing actions (Young and Middlemiss, 2012), is fully exerted by consumers. Hence, it is assumed that consumption acts are mostly rational and endow the consumer with total agency. In this sense, the consumer is analysed in the micro-level.

For the individualist paradigm, a person is an agent that has a socioeconomic status and it is strongly guided by both, the possibilities for acquiring something and the personal preferences. According to this paradigm these two factors would produce a rational outcome of the consumption decision. In addition, the consumer is also a decision maker that uses knowledge to guide consumption acts. This perspective tends to conceive humans as *homo oeconomicus* entities, “emphasising individuals’ micro-level actions, driven by rational, calculating considerations” (Kirchberg, 2007, p. 116). Consumer research studies are mostly ruled by the assumption that individuals are “rational decision makers, mostly concerned with the functional benefits of goods, and maximizing subjective utility” (Arnould and Thompson, 2018, p. 8). These studies also support the notion of the consumers as a purely rational element of the purchase equation that evaluates a number of independent factors such as prices, advertising and retailing systems.

More recently, some traditional individualist fields have started to acknowledge the fact that other aspects apart from individuals’ rationality in consumption activities. One example of this is the field of behavioural economics which has been evolving to include not only the individual aspects in the decision making process but also the relevant social dimensions involved in consumption (Samson, 2014). Contributions on this field have helped to understand how purchasing decisions are linked to emotions and habits (Mont and Plepys, 2008), which are linked to the individual dimension of

consumption. However, some limitations of these perspectives are that they may tend to over-emphasise behaviours, attitudes, and choices of individuals (Evans, 2019) and overlook the societal factors in the consumption process.

### **Integrative approaches to consumption**

So far, the sociological and the individualist theoretical perspectives on consumption can be positioned as the two extremes in consumption studies: the first, highlighting the role of society and structures in consumption; the latter, stressing the agency of individuals and their freedom in purchase decisions. However, a third category of consumption studies has emerged from a more conciliatory approach. The integrative perspective comprises both the structural and the agential factors, considering them as complementary aspects in the consumption process. For this category, the concepts of *homo oeconomicus* and *homo sociologicus* are complementary (Kirchberg, 2007, p. 118) instead of being opposed to one another.

Consumer culture field has been incorporating an integrative approach aiming to understand consumption as part of the culture, its representations and the agency of consumers. It is focused on how “consumption affects personal identity, social interactions, affiliations... and behaviours in the commercial marketplace... [and] how these interrelations are manifested across a wide range of consumption contexts” (Arnould and Thompson, 2018, p. 1). It builds upon different areas of knowledge as social psychology, anthropology, material culture, sociology, and history; thus, the variety of perspectives allows the analysis of the consumer as a complex unit that interacts within a sociocultural context.

The integrative approaches also acknowledge the fact that there is an interaction between the structure and the agents, “the only rationality that shapes consumption is not the macro social one, the one that the large economic agents decide” (García Canclini, 1995, p. 43) nor is the individual as an isolated entity. With different nuances, the integrative approaches to consumption recognise both, the importance of the individual factors, as well as the societal conditions as part of the elements that constitute the consumption process.

Integrative approaches study to what extent structures shape agents in consumption and how these consumption processes influence structures which constitute a symbiotic relationship between the two spheres. Since this perspective recognises the relevance of elements like culture and context and their interaction with

individuals throughout the consumption process, the present study aligns to these principles.

In summary, each perspective has contributed to understand consumption based on a different framework and a particular philosophical stand point. Knowing the differences between them and how do they conceptualise consumption activities and the role of consumers, is important to recognise how these perspectives can be used and their strengths and limitations. Table 2.1 summarises the three perspectives by emphasising the main components of each one of them.

**Table 2.1.** Epistemological perspectives on consumption and their differences.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Sociological</b>	<b>Individualist</b>	<b>Integrative</b>
<b><i>Subject of study</i></b>	Consumer society	Consumer behaviour	Consumer culture
<b><i>Consumer considered as</i></b>	An element that replicates the established system	A decision maker	A configurator of routines
<b><i>Freedom of choice</i></b>	Subject to institutions and a mannequin to commodity culture.	Sovereign consumer	Reflective consumer
<b><i>Consumption acts are a result of</i></b>	No reflection	Deliberation	Practical consciousness
<b><i>Consumption</i></b>	As an act that sustains and replicates structures	As an end in itself	As a means for accomplishing something. A moment in other practices

Based on Miller (2001); Warde (2005); Bauman (2007); Spaargaren (2011); Warde (2014) & Evans (2019).

#### **2.1.4 The ontological dimension of consumption: why people consume?**

The ontological aspect of consumption addresses the nature of consumption activities. This dimension of consumption explores the question of what the main drivers for consumption are and what is the relationship of goods consumption and needs. In contrast to the epistemological dimension, which deals with the consumption process itself, the ontological dimension of consumption explores to what extent consumption is driven by human needs and the sufficiency of goods in order to satisfy them.

The ontology of consumption focuses primarily on the role of consumption as way to satisfy physical, social, psychological and emotional needs of human beings and how goods become satisfiers for these needs. Contemporary discussions on consumption and human put in evidence how, in the society of consumers, the acts of consumption are not exclusively linked to basic needs but also, to wants and desires (Jackson et al., 2004) which leads us to the quandary of the insatiability of human needs.

With the aim of exploring this subject in depth, the theory of needs has been central in defining under which circumstances purchasing activities can be framed as needs satisfaction and which others would be framed as superfluous or even counterproductive for consumers. In contemporary societies, it has been observed that the generalised norm is that: “justifiable consumption is by no means limited to questions of replacement, but is largely aspirational in character” (Campbell, 1998, p. 238). In other words, the boundaries between wants and needs are less clear when they are framed in a sociocultural context.

There are different proposals on what human needs are (Max-Neef, 1991; Doyal and Gough, 1993; Kenrick et al., 2010; Maslow, 2013; Gough, 2015). The different interpretations of human needs can be classified in three groups: (i) needs as internal forces that drive the acts of consumption; (ii) needs as external or environmental requirements as aim to a specific end; and (iii) needs as requirements for performing an act. (Gasper, 1996, cited in Jackson et al., 2004, p. 6). However, the debate on the validity, the relevance and the legitimacy of consumption as needs satisfier is still open in both social and natural sciences. When consumption is framed as a needs' satisfier activity, some ethical problems start to emerge since every perspective on human needs have different definition of what can be considered as a need.

The relevance of consumption for the construction of lifestyles as well as the social activities linked to it suggest that human needs cannot be reduced to pure physiological requirements. However, it is possible to conceptually differentiate *needs* and *wants*. On the one hand, the economic perspective would agree with the fact that consumption of any product would help to meet a need, which implies no distinction between needs, wants and preferences. On the other hand, a human development perspective would argue that consumption and well-being are not strictly linked, and that needs satisfaction is systemic, multidimensional and non-hierarchical (Max-Neef, 1991). Consequently, the consumption of goods, as an act for meeting needs, must explore the different dimensions in which a need is being satisfied through the acquisition, use and even divestment of goods since simultaneous needs can be satisfied through these activities.



However, the debate on when consumption serves strictly as a need satisfaction activity seems limited since, in the society of consumers, the legitimisation for acquisition and replacement of goods is the norm. For some perspectives there is no pragmatic difference between what is needed, what is wanted and what is desired. Hence, the ontological dimension can set ethical questions and contribute to a broader discussion on human needs. Nevertheless, in order to generate new perspectives and solutions to problems derived from consumption, differences “between ‘true’ or ‘false’ needs are untenable since ‘all needs human recognise as real, should also be considered as real” (Heller, cited in Campbell, 1998, p. 241). Further discussions on the ontological dimension of needs should be oriented towards the construction of these needs and how they reached this place of normality.

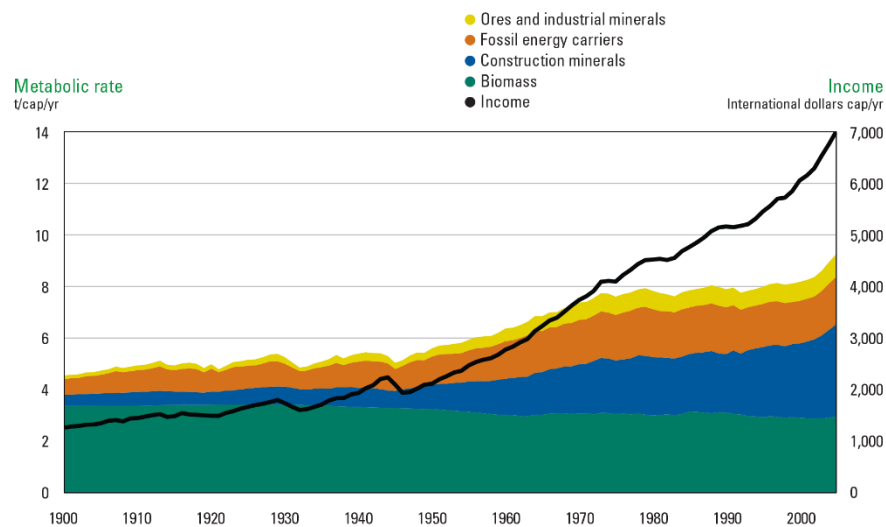
## **2.2 Sustainable Consumption. An alternative way of development or an oxymoron.**

The relevance of consumption for contemporary societies in terms of satisfying not only physical needs but also needs such as identity, participation is well established. Consumption has been classified previously as a pervasive activity; it is part of many other practices (Warde, 2005, p. 137) and it is interrelated to the construction of contemporary lifestyles. Hence, its relevance cannot be reduced to superfluous acquisition of material goods. Nonetheless, new challenges have emerged as a result of overconsumption.

The term overconsumption can be defined as the “overuse or damage of natural resources and the environment” (Quelch and Jocz, 2007, cited in Sheth et al., 2011, p. 25) in reference to the speed in which raw materials are extracted from nature leaving no margin for their regeneration. Nowadays, overconsumption is considered one of the major challenges for achieving sustainability. According to footprint indicators, the limits of resources consumption have been surpassed. Currently, humanity is using natural resources faster than the planet can regenerate them. For maintaining current ways of living, we would require an amount of resources equivalent to 1.75 Earths (Global Footprint Network, 2019). Hence, the potential for systems to regenerate themselves are compromised.

Consumption has become a relevant topic for sustainability as a result of contemporary consumption practices, which has led to a rapid increase in resources demand. Material use in a global level has grown faster than population; use of materials

per capita has increased in a significant way. Metabolic rates, the use of resources per capita, continues growing in the industrialised countries (Figure 2.3). Some other empirical facts such as the rise in energy demand and waste generation put in evidence the challenges that consumption patterns represent for sustainability (Fischer-Kowalski et al., 2011). It is for this reason that consumption practices become a relevant issue not only for understanding the culture and social interactions but also in terms of environmental issues.



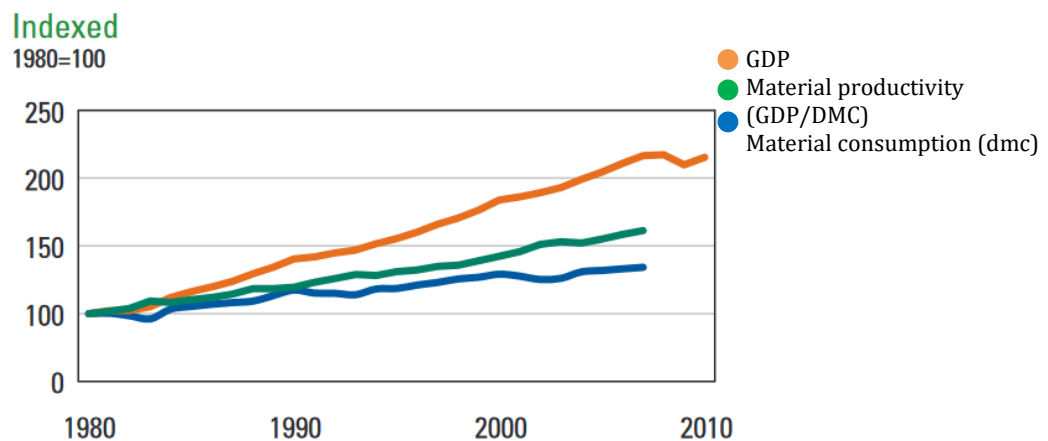
**Figure 2.3** Global metabolic rates 1900-2005, and income.  
Source: Krausmann, et al. in Fischer-Kowalski et al. (2011, p. 18).

Some perspectives on sustainability have declared the urgency of reducing material consumption and decoupling it from growth (Fischer-Kowalski et al., 2011; Heikkurinen, 2018). By studying consumption, we also search answers for better ways of using resources through the observation of material-mediated activities in contemporary societies. Hence, the significance of consumption cannot be neglected, and for this study, consumption is an opportunity to find alternatives aligned to needs satisfaction and sustainability goals but also acknowledging the importance that the material world has in terms of cultural representations and social interactions.

### 2.2.1 The concept of sustainable consumption

Consumption is an essential pillar for contemporary cultural expressions and highly embedded in people's lifestyles. This has caused the raise in resource usage and waste numbers due to the changes in consumption patterns (Figure 2.4). Two main factors

have driven the increasing levels of consumption: the rise in affluence, which implies a higher purchase power in middle and lower income consumers (Kharas, 2010), and the normalisation of goods replacement (Leslie and Reimer, 2003; Gibson et al., 2013; Laitala, 2014) which has been caused by shifts around material and cultural practices together with discourses around durable goods in the consumerist era, have caused an intensification in consumption and waste generation. This issue is also linked to the problem that products that are still functioning are disposed by owners, which generates waste of “unused utility” (Bolton and Alba, 2012). These two factors have caused an increase in both consumption and waste generation numbers.



**Figure 2.4.** Gross domestic production and domestic material consumption in OECD countries, 1980–2000.

Source: OECD, 2008b in Fischer-Kowalski et al. (2011, p. 19).

Over the last two decades, the notion of consumption started to be conceived as significant for environmental issues. Consumption is a concept that comprises not only the acquisition and the use of goods but an activity that is closely linked to use of natural resources and waste generation. Therefore, consumers are "self-conscious about the finality of the resources that are thereby removed by the act of consumption" (Miller, 2005, p. 29). The world faces new environmental, economic and social challenges; it has been reported that global energy consumption in 2017 increased by 2.1%. There is a rising demand for natural resources and commodities (OECD, 2015b) and, at the same time, waste generation per capita has been increasing and the trend indicates that the figures will continue to increase (Hoornweg and Bhada-Tata, 2012). Within this context, sustainable consumption has positioned as one of the most relevant contemporary discussions.

The concept of sustainable consumption can be traced back to *Agenda 21*<sup>1</sup> in which it was established that a transformation of consumption patterns was needed. It can be defined as “the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations” (Lorek and Vergragt, 2015, p. 19). It encompasses not only acquisition but also production patterns in both social and environmental dimensions. A set of shared basic principles have been identified:

- To address environmental, economic, social and political aspects in consumption
- To reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse
- To use innovative capacities to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption and production through technology and science.

One of the main components of this discussion and the reason why this research focuses on divestment derives from the gap of knowledge that exists inside the consumption field and material possessions. For some perspectives, it is really clear that consumption levels can be reduced without compromising life quality (Jackson, 2006, p. 12). For other perspectives, the fact that consumption is increasing in society is proof of a progressing society with a better quality of life. However, a key question remains about what is needed, what is wanted, and how these two concepts can be differentiated within the sustainable consumption debate. Hence, sustainable consumption is also about recalibrating human actions in order to redirect consumption patterns to reach both human well-being and the conservation of environment and natural resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Agenda 21 Plan is a United Nations action plan developed in the Earth Summit in 1992 at Rio de Janeiro. In this document it was established the programme of action for sustainable development.

## 2.2.2 Perspectives on sustainable consumption

The field of sustainable consumption has been evolving to incorporate not only the transformation of production systems but also strategies that include the use of goods and services that can reduce the environmental impact of consumption activities. Hence, sustainable consumption goals now include concepts like contraction of consumption and transformation of consumption habits. In order to accomplish so, different perspectives on sustainable consumption have been developed, emphasising the role of different agents such as governments, manufacturers and consumers.

The different perspectives on sustainable consumption can be grouped according to the epistemological approach to which they subscribe. Different positions have been identified. They are aligned with the epistemological perspectives on consumption and can be grouped in three main categories:

- The first group of research on sustainable consumption has a structuralist approach. This means that these studies look for a transformation of regulations and institutions that control environmental and social issues should improve mechanisms in order to force companies and individuals to improve their practices. Structures such as government and culture have a major role in promoting changes towards sustainability. Terms like *ecogovernmentality* and *“green governmentality”* (Welch and Warde, 2015, p. 87) are used to define the relevance of “state and non-state authorities promote specific systems of knowledge” (Rutheford, 2017) and how this affects citizens' sustainable practices. The approach of this discourse is aligned with the top-down strategies, which endows structures to guide the changes towards a sustainable future.
- The second group supports the premise that personal self-control is the solution for overconsumption. Thus, contributing to sustainable goals through responsible consumption relies mostly on the consumer and is carried out through individual decisions. This perspective supports the notion of the sovereign consumer<sup>2</sup>. Within this dialogue, the impulsiveness of consumers has been identified as a key problem as it is difficult to help individuals to make conscious changes in their behaviours and live in a more sustainable way by

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<sup>2</sup> This term has been used in the economics field to refer to the characteristic of any consumer that has delegated no power to institutions, hence, this allows her/him to exert power to demand.

consuming less. In addition, this perspective also promotes *educating the consumer* as a strategy to reduce or to stop the acquisition of goods.

Limitations of this type of studies are related to the fact that “sustainable consumption involves many factors other than individual behaviour” (Ceglia et al., 2015). However, the individual decision making process is still the predominant type of research in the field of sustainable consumption (Shove, 2010, cited in Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014, p. 26). Individualist approaches on sustainable consumption are the most frequently used. It is mainly centred on the consumption decision making process and its relationship with sustainable and ethical purchases. These studies focus on how to transform individual behaviour to have a positive influence in their purchasing practices to turn them in more sustainable ones. From a psychological point of view, these proposals also study in what ways human behaviour can be influenced in order to reduce resource demand, either when purchasing or when using products.

- The third group follows an integrative approach in which both, the individual and the institutions are responsible for transforming unsustainable ways of consumption. Individuals and structures are elements that interact with each other. Therefore, the integrative alternatives for promoting sustainable consumption need to take into account actions are directed by habit, structure and culture (Young and Middlemiss, 2012, p. 743). Hence, in order to achieve more sustainable ways of consumption, both agency and structure need to change. Within this perspective, decisions on consumption are influenced by situational, contextual, cultural and individual elements.

In conclusion, even when aligned to sustainability principles, the three groups differ from each other in the weight they confer to the individual will, the societal forces and the contextual conditions that are involved in the consumption process (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2.** Epistemological perspectives on Sustainable Consumption.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Individualist</b>	<b>Sociological</b>	<b>Integrative</b>
<b><i>For sustainable consumption to be accomplished</i></b>	The individual needs to change	The structure needs to change	Both need to change
<b><i>The motor for change is</i></b>	Empower individuals to change their actions.  Bottom-up strategies	Change the context to change individuals' actions  Top-down strategies	Intertwined processes of interaction.  Mutual influencing and co-shaping
<b><i>Achieve sustainable consumption by</i></b>	Make different decisions	Transform structures	Developing new practices
<b><i>Disciplines</i></b>	Psychology Economics	Sociology	Sociology Cultural Studies

Sources: Spaargaren (2011); Young and Middlemiss (2012); Spaargaren (2013); Sahakian and Wilhite (2014).

### **2.3 Framing the research. Building a lifestyle through goods in the consumerist era**

A brief overview of sustainable consumption has been presented. However, it is important to clarify that the term has been used to group different spheres of human activities, consumption issues and their impacts in terms of social and environmental issues. From all these activities, three main fields for studying the impact of consumption have been identified:

- The *industrial production* perspective from which it can be understood to what extent industries contribute to impacts.
- The *material use* perspective that evaluates the environmental of materials and resources usage.
- The *final consumption* perspective which evaluates what products have the greatest impacts throughout their lifespan. (UNEP, 2010, p. 21).

Each category prioritises different moments in the whole spectrum of consumption. For this study, the main focus is the final consumption stage in which is comprised daily life interactions and material goods within the context of households. This allows to understand how in everyday practices, the consumers as agents enact the possibilities of more sustainable consumption patterns.

The present study presents an alternative to understand consumption from an integrative approach in the light of divestment practices. In view of the fact that consumer behaviour has been explored extensively and less has been said about its links with the sociocultural factors and their impact on sustainable consumption, the framework aims to contribute to understanding how sustainable consumption can also be contextually determined and how in consumption processes, individual and contextual factors influence the final outcome.

An integrative approach to consumption needs to incorporate both agential and structural elements. Within the frame of sustainable consumption, it is also important to acknowledge the role of materiality for all the cultural and social dynamics that are mediated by things. As stated previously, consumption and material goods are meaningful for contemporary societies in many ways: individuals, “[t]he new heroes of consumer culture...display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle” (Featherstone, 1991, cited in Evans and Jackson, 2008, p. 9). This implies that studying consumption without considering the sociality of it, as an individual decision in an isolated environment, could result in ineffective ways of intervention since the roots for overconsumption would be overlooked, ignoring the strong impact that different dimensions of social life have in practices.

To achieve more sustainable ways of consumption there are a number of difficulties. It is known that economic systems, infrastructure, the dominant culture and the lifestyles need to be transformed, at the same time changes inside institutions and the power relationships are required. (Vergragt et al., 2014 cited in Lorek and Vergragt, 2015, p. 19). To navigate through these difficulties, sustainable consumption has attended issues that can be classified in three different types of strategies:

1. **By transforming consumer goods to align them with sustainability principles:** This alternative is the closest to sustainable production and technological developments. Environmental impacts can be reduced through improvements in materials and production technologies. It can also be considered as the first approach to sustainable consumption. Within this frame,



material changes to products (i.e. biodegradable materials) became a popular solution to reduce the environmental impact of goods. This group also encompasses the dematerialisation of consumer goods.

2. **By reframing consumption under the umbrella of the human needs.** It implies a more abstract dimension of sustainable consumption since it is not reflected through material aspects of goods. Achieving sustainability through this paradigm means that the human needs satisfaction must be decoupled from materiality. Therefore, it could imply transforming the way in which we perceive needs satisfiers.
3. **By encouraging the changes on human-object interactions:** From attitudinal aspects to consumption to the modification of environment policies, this alternative comprises consumers' efforts towards consuming in more sustainable ways and would include both individual and social levels of action. Frequently, it is applied more in durable goods (e.g. appliances, furniture and technological devices) than to single-use goods (e.g. food and medications)<sup>3</sup>.

Within the field of consumer culture theory, some authors have studied the relevance of them in terms of identity and social relationships (Appadurai, 1988; Douglas and Isherwood, 2002; Miller, 2005; Bauman, 2007). Hence, perspectives that claim for a less consumerist society under the perspective that it is easy to stop consuming because it is superfluous, might overlook the relevance that it has for carrying out many other practices in everyday life. Therefore, the act of consumption, if linked to needs as self-identity construction and cultural rituals, cannot be “castigated as greed, stupidity, and insensitivity to want” (Douglas and Isherwood, 2002). Hence, the challenge is to account for the individual, social and cultural dimensions of consumption. In order to disentangle the conflicts between consumption and sustainability, more contemporary approaches have opted for framing consumption within integrative approaches that account for the relevance of the sociality of consumption and at the same time, recognise the environmental and social implications of overconsumption.

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<sup>3</sup> The classification of goods in durable and nondurable is traditionally an economical way of distinguishing the two types of goods. Single-use, also called nondurable goods are all these products that can be used or consumed only once.

### **2.3.1 The design corner: Durable goods, lifespans and sustainable consumption**

It has been already discussed how the rise in consumption and the subsequent increase in waste generation is becoming the biggest challenge for sustainability (WRAP, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2019). The case of durable goods is relevant for this study since they are a point of convergence for consumption practices, the commoditisation of lifestyles and the impact of material consumption on the environment. Some examples of how consumption patterns are not sustainable has been incorporated to current lifestyles are found in daily use products such as clothing and technological devices. The consumption and replacement of these items has increased consistently in the last years. As an example, the electronic waste, which is the fastest-growing waste stream worldwide, has reached 50 million tonnes in 2018 (World Economic Forum, 2019). Another case that illustrates this challenge is the clothing consumption, which in the United Kingdom grew from 950,000 tonnes in 2012 to 1,130,000 in 2016 (WRAP, 2017, p. 9).

Contemporary solutions for sustainable consumption goals are framed around waste reduction through prevention, recirculation and through innovation as a tool to generate new products, processes and materials centred on technology and science (Jackson, 2006). To this end, some attempts at solving the problem have been to design or redesign products in order to reduce their environmental impact by transforming consumer goods to align them with sustainability principles, as explained previously. Design disciplines have contributed to accomplishing this by proposing mainly technocentric solutions such as the introduction of environmentally friendly materials or green technologies. These contributions can be framed in the, what has been defined previously as the first wave of sustainable design.

The relationship between sustainability and design has a long and dynamic story (Table 2.3). Terms like *eco-efficiency* and *eco-effectiveness* were not popular concepts until the 1990s, and their aim was to align sustainable and economic development. The goal of these strategies is based on the principle of reducing environmental impact through progressive improvements (Fiksel, 2012), which would lead eventually to more sustainable ways of consumption. This paradigm of environmentally responsible products popularised the concepts of *life-cycle* and *lifespan* of products with the aim of unveiling the impact that consumption of ordinary goods had on the environment.

**Table 2.3.** Paradigms on sustainable consumption and the design response.

<b>Birth</b>	<b>Paradigm</b>	<b>Core values</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Design Response</b>
<b>~1970</b>	Green consumption	Technocentric Shallow ecological approach	Motivated by the green economy and clean production systems, this consumption paradigm was driven by the goods that promised less or non-environmental damage when producing and commercialising.	Green Design Eco-design Life-cycle approach
<b>~1990</b>	Sustainable and Ethical Consumption	Eco-socio-centric Introduction of the concepts of ethical and social responsibility	This consumption paradigm is more aware of the social impacts of consumption.  It comprises not only the environmental damages but also human aspects of production and commercialisation of goods.	Sustainable design Design for sustainable consumption

Source: Colby (1991); Madge (1997); Thorpe (2010).

For a long period, research in the field of sustainability focused on optimising lifespans of products by trying to find ways to make them last for longer (Madge, 1997). However, more recent studies have revealed how the longevity of products is not exclusively a matter of performance and durability in goods. The lifespan of a product is more than “a property of objects... [or] a rationally calculated number that is inscribed in a product's design” (Jaeger-Erben and Proske, 2017). Within this perspective of considering immaterial aspects of possessions and their links to longevity, a new stage of sustainable consumption in the design field started to emerge. These proposals explore not only the manufacturing processes but also, the *use* stage of products in order to understand the role of consumers in lifespans of products.

### 2.3.2 Durable goods design and Sustainable Consumption

Aligned with sustainable consumption principles, there is a set of discourses that have been emerging to change the way in which goods are designed, used and discarded. Since the emergence of the sustainable consumption term in the Rio Earth Summit (Jackson, 2006), a series of alternatives have been proposed with a product-design orientation. Some of the proposals can be defined as individualist approaches to sustainable consumption; some others are situated in the technological transformation of material goods and infrastructures for supporting them.

One of the relevant discourses that can be situated inside the individualist approach to consumption is the field of *Design for sustainable behaviour* (Bhamra et al., 2011) which suggests that changing consumption patterns is possible through behaviour modification. DfSB aims to explore “how design can influence user behaviour to reduce negative social or environmental use impacts” (Bhamra et al., 2011, p. 430). Within this perspective, the behavioural aspects of use are studied. When designers get to know how a product is used and why it is used in such a way, they have the potential to propose design-led solutions that help users to save resources in the use phase.

Another example is proposed by Chapman (2005), who suggests that appealing to emotions can contribute to the creation of more longer lasting products outside the technocentric sphere. The premise is that, there are some objects that users keep for long periods of time because they establish an emotional connection with them. Even when this proposal is also situated under the individualist approach, it suggests that designers should encourage innovative practices inspired by more meaningful factors that engage the consumers, instead of focusing exclusively on material solutions for sustainable consumption issues. Chapman (2005) explains:

Crippled by its own brilliance, the under-stimulated human brain must now search elsewhere for stimulation of a more synthetic, designed nature. The modern consumer is born and shall, henceforth, mine the glossy veneers of material culture in the hopeless pursuit of qualitative stimulation (p. 30).

Another group of proposals are centred on understanding obsolescence. They advocate for the transformation of goods with the aim of optimising their lifespans. There are different perspectives on why a product becomes obsolete (Table 2.4). Hence, these strategies aim to improve either the efficiency of the product or to promote the attachment to them. By understanding the behaviour of the users and their purchasing and replacement decisions, these strategies aim to improve the design of products in order to create longer lasting products.

**Table 2.4.** Obsolescence from different perspectives.

<b>Cooper</b>	<b>Heiskanen (1996)</b>	<b>Kostecki (1998)</b>	<b>Van Nes and Cramer (2006)</b>
Fitness Function Fashion	By failure Dissatisfaction Changes in needs	Functional Economic Symbolic ~as determinants of durability~	Wear and tear Improved utility Improved expression New desires ~as a typology for replacement motives~

Based on Cooper (2010a, pp. 3-29).

These contributions have originated different strategies: centred on product features, individual and societal aspects. Within these strategies, designers, users, manufacturers and society can be involved. However, from the design practice, most of the strategies have focused in the features of products, giving less attention to the individual and societal aspects of obsolescence which has created controversy within the consumption studies since the efficacy to reduce overconsumption is still in question.

It has been argued that, in order to transform consumption practices, not everything should rely on material aspects of possessions. Defying obsolescence might be perceived as the requirement of creating longer lasting products. However, additional research could be helpful in order to find out when and how a longer lifespan of products is the best solution. In other words, we first need to ask: is the creation of longer lasting goods the solution to consumption issues? How is a longer lasting item received by the consumer? Does this apply for all types of goods? These questions aim to account for the relevance of consumption activities and their significance for contemporary lifestyles. As Miller (2012) explains: “material culture tends to be symbolic before it is functional... we remain interested in totally useless stuff because useless stuff generally has a social and symbolic role” (p. 18). This reflection emphasises on the fact that even those that are considered unnecessary goods have social and cultural meanings, potentially linked to human needs such as participation and self-identity. Consumption here is a means to meet those needs. Furthermore, since it has been recognised that consumption plays a major role in the creation of a lifestyle, design practice should also acknowledge the fact that needs of participation, self-identity and creation are of equal importance when acquiring products.

Several studies have explored the possibilities of enhancing lifespans by improving the durability of products (Cooper, 2010a). Progress has been made in specific areas of sustainable design supporting the notion that longer lifespans can reduce the environmental impact of overconsumption and waste generation. However, efforts have been insufficient to outweigh effects of environmental impact. Limitations of these proposals lie in the fact that some traditional design practices seem to be incompatible with sustainable consumption principles. As Walker mentions: “instead of trying to ‘force-fit’ sustainable principles into an existing and often unreceptive manufacturing system, it may be useful to approach the subject from the opposite direction” (Walker, 2006, p. 30); in other words, efforts for changing the status quo of the problem might require new paradigms on design and material possessions.

### **2.3.3 Still searching for answers: the failure of the postmodern promise of a sustainable world**

Together with the advancement of knowledge on environmental and social issues caused by industrialisation and postmodern ways of living, the willingness to change the current situation also became relevant. Without a doubt in the last decades, the awareness of environmental issues and their link to contemporary consumption patterns increased. However, two main limitations have been identified so far:

- The gap between knowledge, attitudes and actions: Even when people is more aware of environmental problems and recognise the urgency of transforming consumption patterns in order to reduce the environmental impacts of it, there is still a gap between knowledge and attitudes towards pro-environmental practices and real actions (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002; Antonetti and Maklan, 2015; Sumner, 2018).
- The commoditisation of sustainability: A second limitation within the consumption answers to sustainability is the phenomenon of *greenisation* of goods. This term is used to describe the maelstrom of green products and their disseminated consumption, which resulted in a backfire effect, generating a simplistic approach to sustainable consumption and challenging the validity of both, the idea of more sustainable practices and the conception of the ethical consumer. This issue revealed that eco-friendly products were not the solution for achieving more sustainable ways of consumption since becoming a green consumer, which derived in creating a new mainstreamed market niche of

affluent and young people (Lane and Gorman-Murray, 2011, p. 20) promoting this way of consumption as the right way to consume.

Considering all of this evidence, it seems that sustainable consumption still has a large area to explore. It has also been studied how since proposals centred on green markets became a means of distinction, wealthier people are frequently those who consume environmentally friendly products (Gibson et al., 2013, p. 11) which brings the question of how linked sustainable practices are to pro-environmentalism and to a status and affiliation symbols. This and other ambiguities inside sustainable consumption field have been identified, highlighting the need for developing further research on the subject by focusing on stages of consumption that have been less researched, involving not only the decision making during the purchase stage but also including use, disposition and replacement of goods.

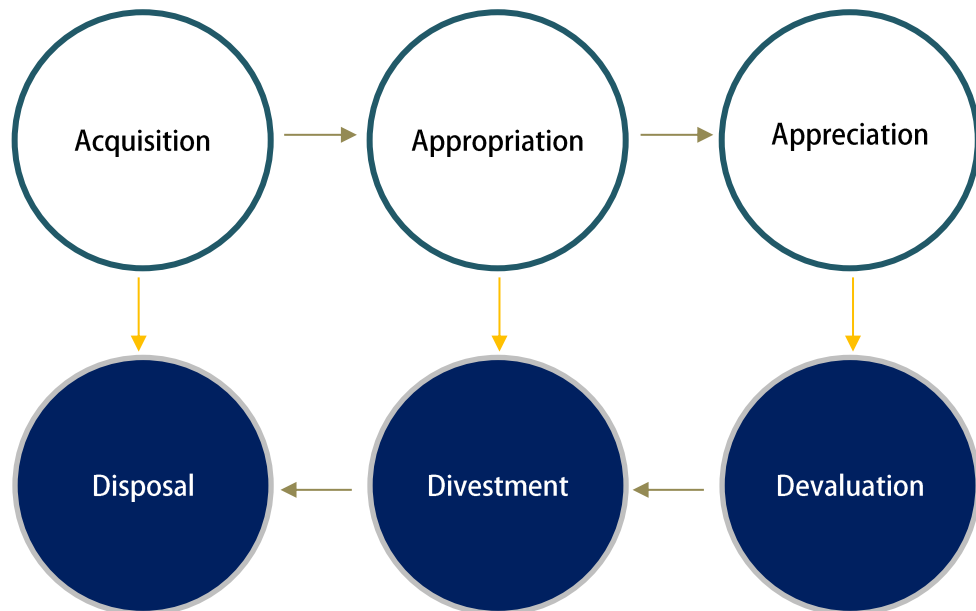
#### **2.4 Where do we go from here? The relevance of post-acquisition stages of products**

Thus far, it has been observed how consumption and replacement of goods are linked to waste generation and resources usage. Some studies have focused on evaluating the life-cycle of products in order to optimise lifespans as a preventive measure for material consumption. In view of the fact that waste management is inconvenient and expensive, a product-lifespan optimisation approach (Evans and Cooper, 2010, p. 320) has gained prominence as a waste reduction strategy. It is for this reason that product durability started to be associated with longevity, assuming that a product would have a longer lifespan if it had the ability to perform fully its function for long periods. However, as mentioned before, by emphasising on the material functionality aspect of durable goods, the solutions for replacement and overconsumption started to be mainly techno-centric, creating an imbalance among other factors that affect a product's longevity.

After recognising the fact that other aspects, apart from technological solutions influence products' lifespan, it is necessary to find new ways of addressing the high replaceability in durable goods and the waste of unused utility (Bolton and Alba, 2012). Here is where the post-acquisition experiences of consumers take relevance for sustainable consumption. Although there are some studies focused on this topic (Chapman, 2005; Hendrik N. J. Schifferstein, 2008; Cooper, 2010a; Bhamra et al., 2011; Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2012; Glover, 2015), very little research has been done on the

process that material possessions go through after being acquired until they gradually reach the waste stream.

Consumption for this research consists of many stages. It is not merely the act of acquiring a product but more a series of acts that together constitute the consumption process itself. As previously mentioned, acquisition, appropriation and appreciation are moments in the consumption process (Warde, 2005) and it involves different phases of the products' lifespans. In addition, Evans (2019) suggested that three more stages can be situated in the consumption process spectrum: devaluation, divestment and disposal (p. 507). Hence, the consumption spectrum includes six stages (Figure 2.5) in which the lifespan of a product is configured.



**Figure 2.5.** The consumption process and its moments.  
Based on Evans (2019).



### **2.4.1 Changing the status quo. The journey from design to divestment**

Post-acquisition stages of products have been gaining relevance in the last decade. These studies in post-acquisition have provided insights for a better understanding of sustainable consumption practices through the optimisation of “efficiency and sufficiency” (Cooper, 2005, cited in Cooper, 2010a, p. 14) of products. One of these post-purchase stages is divestment.

The concept of divestment refers to the process through which owners separate either spatially, mentally and/or emotionally from their possessions. Gregson et al. (2007a) define divestment as the counterpart to appropriation, and it can also be understood as “a point of intersection for practices –where certain forms of engagement with objects have waned or been interrupted, and others have replaced them” (Glover, 2015) indicating that the divestment can be linked to other events in the life of the consumers.

Until recently, little attention has been paid to the divestment process even when it plays a fundamental role within the sustainable consumption agenda in terms of the links between consumption and waste generation practices. As opposed to consumption studies, divestment is relatively a new field, and only a few scholars have used it to generate a broader landscape of consumption practices.

The term divestment, as opposed to obsolescence, acknowledges the fact that, even when possessions remain the same, they can fall into disuse or be disposed as a result of owners' life circumstances. Divestment is an action rather than just a passive term to describe the status of the product. In other words, divestment implies agency to owners and not just to the durability of things. From this perspective, individuals, their circumstances and the products are equally involved in the divestment process. Hence, the concept of divestment also gives relevance to the social context acknowledging that this factor also shapes decisions on possessions divestment.

Divestment studies can be classified into two different groups: those that define divestment as a decision made by individuals, and those that consider divestment from an integrative approach accounting for the social factors that shape it. These studies have examined divestment in different contexts and observing different types of goods and provide important insights into the field of sustainable consumption in terms of identifying existing conduits for divesting goods, and people's ideas around them. In general terms, these studies share similarities in the way they classify how people

decide to discard their goods (Table 2.5) depicting the means through which possessions are more commonly divested in contemporary western societies.

**Table 2.5.** Divestment channels.

<b>Harrel and McConocha</b>	<b>Gregson et al.</b>	<b>Glover</b>
Keeping Throwing Away Selling/Swapping Giving away: <i>Passing along</i> <i>Donating with tax deduction.</i> <i>Donating without tax deduction.</i>	Giving away Passing on Selling Binning	Practices of retainment: <i>Storing</i> <i>Making do</i> <i>Treasuring</i> Return-oriented: <i>Selling</i> Altruistic divestment: <i>Charities</i> <i>Passing-on</i> Ridding

Based on Harrell and McConocha (1992); Gregson et al. (2007b); Glover (2015).

Even though the divestment channels have been identified by these studies, little investigation has been done on the motivations for divestment and which of these channels is chosen as well as which sociocultural factors are influencing the decision on divestment. To date, some scholars have examined the social dimension of divestment (Gregson et al., 2007b; Glover, 2015) intending to observe how divestment is embedded in social life. Gregson et al. (2007b) argue how divestment, apart from having the primary aim of material dispossession, also creates connections among communities' members, stating an argument that supports the sociality of divestment.

Sustainability in the context of divestment involves ways of preserving the value in possessions and, consequently, reducing waste generation (Glover, 2016, p. 90) Therefore, it is associated to those practices that can prolong the lifespan of products, promotes the reuse or reprocessing of materials or, in the cases in which none of the above is possible, it enables an environmentally responsible waste management. Figure 1.1 presented the waste hierarchy and section 1.2 discussed how waste diversion activities converge with sustainability.

Following this hierarchy, a priori, sustainable divestment can be defined as that practices that helps to reduce harmful environmental and social practices. It is aligned with principles of sustainable consumption which implies reduction of waste and when is the case, the responsible management of waste.

## Divestment from an integrative perspective

One of the main objectives of the present study is to unravel the threads of the discourse of sustainability and its link to divestment through a sociocultural lens. To this end, different theoretical approaches to sustainable consumption have been explored with the aim of integrating the main elements that are involved in the divestment process: persons, as social beings and the context, which condenses culture, infrastructures and the sociohistorical condition of a geographical space.

So far, divestment has been studied under three different perspectives: (i) as an individual decision, (ii) as a consequence of different structural settings, and (iii) as a negotiated action between personal and social dimensions of consumers (Table 2.6). Some studies have stated that divestment can be considered a social activity through which individuals interact and create a space for sharing, recreate and perpetuate values and social links (Gregson et al., 2007b; Gregson et al., 2007a) and as an activity that interconnects various aspects of the individuals and the society (Glover, 2015).

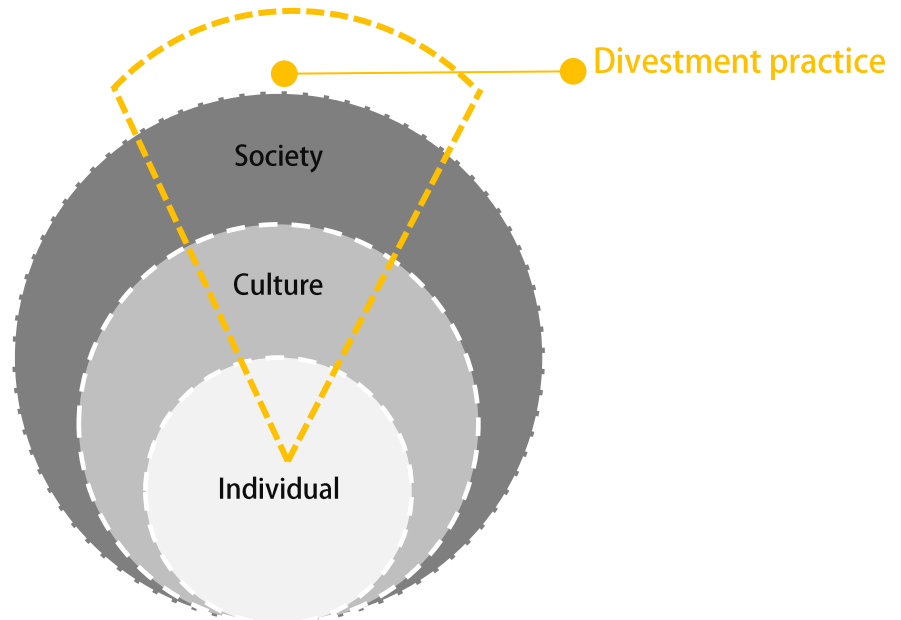
**Table 2.6.** Divestor under three epistemological perspectives and disciplines involved.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Individualist</b>	<b>Sociological (structuralist)</b>	<b>Social practice</b>
<b><i>Divestor as</i></b>	Divestor as isolated individual decision maker.	Divestor as a mechanic propagator of the consumerism system.	Divestor as a reflective being (as an integrative category)
<b><i>Disciplines</i></b>	Cognitive psychology Traditional Economics	Sociology	Sociology Social Psychology Anthropology Cultural studies
<b><i>Level</i></b>	Micro	Macro	Meso

Source: Harrell and McConocha (1992); Gregson et al. (2007b); Glover (2015).

The main purpose of the present study is to investigate the divestment process and its elements, including an understanding of the relevance of a particular context to find ways to contribute to sustainable consumption goals. Hence, a conceptual framework that accounts for the social aspects of divestment is proposed. After analysing the theoretical paradigms through which consumption is studied, the present study opts for an integrative approach (Figure 2.6) to analyse divestment from an interdisciplinary

perspective by incorporating elements from cultural studies, particularly the practice theory. These fields allow connecting the micro, the meso and the macro level.



**Figure 2.6.** Integrative approach for studying divestment.

In this sense, it is acknowledged that divestment practices cannot be fully understood from an individualist approach since cultural and social aspects have a strong influence on the way in which human interact with others and with their environments. Together with consumption, elements that shape divestment might be found within these spheres of the social life. The argument for endeavouring a discussion around material possessions and the relationships that humans establish with them through the lens of an integrative approach follows the next statements:

- There is a need for more information about the factors that affect products' lifespans
- Effective alternatives for promoting sustainable consumption need to acknowledge the role of cultural differences.

In divestment, agency consists in how divestors deploy their practices and according to what conditions. As pointed out by McConocha (1992, p. 399) instead of positioning the consumer as “the end point” he or she can be viewed as a pivot point in a “channel of disposition”. Hence, individuals are considered as carriers of the practice, with the possibility of engaging or not in certain ways of divestment.

#### **2.4.2 Weaving the threads for an integrative approach to divestment. Social Practice Theory**

It is a fact that a single theory would be insufficient to account for human behaviour. For its social nature, consumption is a complex and multidimensional activity, and so is divestment. Hence, in order to answer the research question, a conceptual framework has been constructed by synthesising different approaches that contribute to analyse from an integrative perspective the individual, the cultural and the social dimension of divestment. Warde (2005) expressed his concern about models based on the notion of highly autonomous consumers since they “give a partial understanding of consumption” and he continues arguing that: “fruitful alternatives will avoid methodological individualist accounts of ‘the consumer’” (p. 132). Therefore, by studying divestment from an integrative approach, new theoretical and empirical insights can contribute to a new perspective on sustainable consumption.

It has been discussed previously how approaches to reduce consumption have been mainly focused on promoting individual behavioural changes and on implementing new technologies for environmental impact minimisation. However, within this perspective, some evidence has stressed the insufficiency of the individualist and rationalist approach to promote changes on consumption patterns need for analysing consumption from a sociocultural perspective (Hargreaves, 2011). Within the field of consumption studies, including those developed in the sustainable consumption spectrum, a theoretical approach has emerged fulfilling the need for accounting for consumption in contemporary contexts: the social practice theory. This concept is the subject of the following section.

### 2.4.3 *Thread 1: Social Practice Theory*

Social practice theory emerged mainly from the work of Bourdieu, Schatzki and Giddens<sup>4</sup> who, moving away from the social structures' discourses, opted for a praxeological vision of the world. More recently, theories of practice have been applied to contemporary issues by Shove, Warde, Reckwitz and Nicolini<sup>5</sup>, among others. This approach decentres the discussion from the traditional perspectives of *homo sociologicus* and *homo oeconomicus* and incorporates an appreciation of cultural phenomena (Reckwitz, 2002 cited in Warde, 2005, p. 133). Consequently, the theories of practices have been adopted to analyse different contemporary issues such as climate change, policymaking, and more recently, digital media, consumption and sustainability. Within the field of practice theories, a practice can be defined as a routinised type of behaviour (Reckwitz, 2002, cited in Warde, 2005, p. 132) that is embedded in daily life. Practice is also:

A form of socially established cooperative human activity that involves characteristic forms of understanding (sayings), modes of action (doings), and ways in which people relate to one another and the world (relatings), that 'hang together' in a distinctive project. (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 155)

Within the frame of practice theory, individuals are decentred from what is occurring and become carriers of the practice. This implies that persons are units that internalise specific ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring (Nicolini, 2012, cited in Nicolini, 2017b, p. 20). In this sense, possibilities of acting are never fully determined and consequently, very hard to predict.

Another characteristic of this perspective is that it acknowledges the fact that the context is a determinant factor for describing what happens or what is practised. Nicolini (2017b) highlighted the fact that "practices only acquire meaning when understood in 'context'" (cited in Schatzki, 2002) and history (Holland and Lave, 2009) which helps to identify the sociocultural aspects of divestment in this study.

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<sup>4</sup> Traditional Practice Theory developed as a critique of the structural-functionalist perspectives which indicated that value consensus was the basis of social order

<sup>5</sup> Contemporary perspectives on consumption practices have emphasised the role of the elements of practices such as "ideational, discursive, material, embodied and affective elements" (See Warde, Welch & Paddock, 2017, p. 29).

## Consumption and divestment through the Practice Lens

One of the main conceptual pillars for this investigation is the theory of practice. This approach has been taken forward in this study for two reasons:

- Dynamics of social life are strongly mediated by materiality. By approaching divestment through the theory of practices, it is possible to analyse how objects are part of these dynamics in sociality and what is the role of goods in these relations.
- Sustainable consumption is "one of the most dynamic fields" (Dubuisson-Quellier in Evans, 2019, p. 500); social practice perspective allows to capture this dynamism with which this field of knowledge evolves by analysing the interactions of the macro and the micro level.

The act of consumption has been classified by previous scholars as a ubiquitous activity. This proposition, instead of positioning consumption as a practice itself, recognises that it is "a moment in almost every practice" (Warde, 2005, p. 137). Therefore, the *moments* of consumption become relevant for understanding the processes behind them and the role of practitioners within them. As an example, participating in social activities, practising sports, moving houses and mating, can illustrate how practices involve rituals of consumption since becoming a *practitioner* in these activities requires the acquisition of specific goods. Divestment is a part of this consumption process; therefore, the same rule applies.

Divestment also becomes a *moment* when practising other activities. It stops being perceived as a purpose in itself to become an effect of practising many other activities. Therefore, as with consumption, divestment from a social practice theory should not be treated as a rational sequence of considerations made by individuals; instead, it should be considered as less conscious and shaped by habits and routines (Piscicelli et al., 2016). The creation of a lifestyle in contemporary societies can be considered as a relevant practice and it involves both consumption and divestment activities. Hence, the drivers for consuming and divesting material goods can be identified by tracking practices.

Within the process of consumption, divestment is classified as the counterpart of appropriation (Gregson et al., 2007b; Evans, 2019) implying that there are practices that take material possessions from being *domesticated* (through appropriation processes) to turn into waste. The implications of this phenomenon have an effect not

only in the lifespan of product in question, but also in subsequent consumption process since the practice of divestment has, presumably, links to replacement practices, which originate another act of acquisition.

Divestment has been also categorised as a practice in itself on the grounds that it seems to be “thoroughly reflexive and a key means through which the social order, in the sense of social narratives, is reproduced” (Gregson et al., 2007b, p. 188). This means that it has its own ways of sayings (forms of understanding), doings (modes of action) and relatings (ways in which people relate to one another through the practice). These elements of divestment practice create a particular set of social dynamics. For this study, tracing those dynamics is essential to find ways of more sustainable practices for divesting possessions.

### **The elements in Theories of Practice**

Even though a consensus has been reached on what practices are, it is worth noting that there is no single theory of practice. Instead, a set of contributions to the subject have been established to understand different aspects that practices comprise. Some authors have focused on defining the main components of practices while others have centred on nexuses inside the components of practices (Hargreaves, 2011; Hui et al., 2017).

Some authors have conceptualised the practice through their main elements (Shove et al., 2012; Schatzki, 2002). For Shove et al. (2012) the elements that constitute a practice are: materials, meanings and competencies. For Schatzki, the practical understandings, rules, and teleoaffective structures are the elements of the practice (Gram-Hanssen, 2010, p. 177). Differences between these perspectives are found mainly in the way they engage with materiality (objects) within the practice. Since this study aims to focus in the practice of divestment without centring the study in the items, the approach taken derives from Schatzki’s work in which practical understandings, embodied habits and know-how’s are the elements that shape a practice.

In general terms, from the theories of practice, a set of aspects that are of importance for studying divestment have been identified. These aspects are the context, the agents, the material infrastructures and the nexuses that exist among them. Thus, in the following lines, it is described how these aspects are essential in order to understand the positioning of this study.



A number of scholars among the social practice theory have suggested different classifications of what are the constituent elements of practices (Glover, 2013, p. 7). Because of the nature of the present study, the context, the agents and the material infrastructures are considered the elements that can highlight the intersections among divestment, social practices derived from them, and the motivations behind the practices of divestment.

For the present study, the architectures of practice constitute an appropriate framework to integrate to the social practice perspective. Architectures of practice are defined as “the way in which practices are constituted within specific conditions and arrangements” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 156). This perspective of the social practice derives from the Schatzki’s work. The practice from this point of view implies that individuals, even if they do not know each other, participate in the same social practice because there are elements holding the practice together such as the practical understandings, the rules and the teleoaffective structures (Gram-Hanssen, 2010, p. 177).

To understand a social practice within this frame allows the possibility to study any practice with a set of given pre-conditions that enable the sayings, doings and relatings of a practice. However, these preconditions are, at the same time flexible and they are in constant change. According to Kemmis (2014, p. 156), practice architectures manifest in three different dimensions: the semantic space, the physical space-time and the social space (Table 2.7). According to Kemmis et al. (2014), the project of a practice encompasses:

- a) The intention (aim) that motivates the practice
- b) The actions (sayings, doings and relatings) undertaken in the conduct of the practice
- c) The ends of the actor aims to achieve through the practice although it might turn out that these ends are not attained.

**Table 2.7.** The theories of practice architectures.

<b>Practices are secured in</b>	<b>Intersubjective space/medium</b>	<b>Practice architectures (arrangements) enable and constrain interaction via</b>
Practitioners' "sayings" and "thinking" (the "cognitive")	Semantic space in the medium of language	Cultural-discursive arrangements found in or brought to a site (e.g., ideas)
Practitioners' "doings" (the psychomotor)	Physical space-time in the medium of activity and work	Material economic arrangements found in or brought to a site (e.g., space, time, resources)
Practitioners' "relatings" (the affective)	Social space in the medium of power and solidarity	Social-political arrangements found in or brought to the site (e.g. role relationships)
Which are bundled together in the projects of practices, and the dispositions (habitus) of practitioners.		Which are bundled together in characteristic ways in practice landscapes and practice traditions.

Source: Kemmis et al. (2014).

Since social practice theory is a relatively new field, there are still some theoretical gaps to allow a deep analysis of a practice. The architecture of practices perspective is a development that helps to narrow the focus of social practice theory. It becomes relevant for this research by allowing to capture two elements that are considered as relevant to advance the sustainable consumption field:

- It accounts for the context: Based on the premise that sustainability cannot have the same connotations for different geographical locations, new perspectives for sustainable consumption through studying divestment can be unveiled.
- It accounts for the culture: Together with the context, cultural elements of practices become relevant for understanding the effect of sayings, doings and relatings within a specific culture.

At the same time, through the semantic space, the experiences of practitioners can be better understood through the "sayings". The intention-action gap has been one of the most challenging issues for sustainable consumption (Carrington et al., 2010; Antonetti and Maklan, 2015). By understanding how divestors develop a narrative about divestment experiences, the barriers for action can be articulated in a clearer way.

Correspondingly, this integrative approach to divestment sets the background for a better approach to the contextual factors, which is a gap of knowledge in the field of sustainability.

#### **2.4.4 *Thread 2: The context within a Practice Theory framework***

Practices are “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understandings which depend on shared skills or understanding (Warde et al., 2017, p. 29); but, where do the skills and the shared understandings come from? The answer is the context. The context can be defined as the [metaphysical] space in which values, infrastructures and sociohistorical conditions converge to give birth to a particular setting that enables the agents to act within specific boundaries.

The context, then, does not refer exclusively to a physical space. Within a context, culture and values are embedded. Wentworth defined the context as “the world made a reality through the interaction and the most immediate frame of reference for mutually committed actors... [it is] the arena for human activity delimited by the situation and time. It is a unit of culture” (cited in Cole, 2003, p. 135). This definition gives space also for the interactions between the macro and the micro levels of society, acknowledging the fact that individuals can exert agency within a setting and transform it. At the same time, it recognises that sometimes the surrounds “override all of the cognitive factors” (Stern, 2000, cited in Hargreaves, 2011, p. 81) of individuals, which converges with the notion of the sociality of practices.

For the divestment and sustainability discussion, it is important to highlight that sustainable consumption studies have been overlooking the relevance that contextual factors have when practitioners are deciding how to act. Since most of the studies are carried out in one specific setting, contextual factors are ignored for the reason that a shared scenery does not allow to differentiate individual from the collective aspects (Thøgersen, 2010, cited in Ceglia et al., 2015, p. 415). The same can be applied for divestment practices since, as being part of the consumption stages, it is also contextually shaped.

This obviation towards the implications of contextual factors in any social practice has been creating a gap between intention and action since it is possible that the context might not be enabling practitioners (in the form of consumers or divestors) to act accordingly to their willingness. Sustainable divestment is not only about

practices that happen in a context within a set of cultural aspects, but it is also a matter of how the context provides specific social conditions since “most people do not live up to the promises that they make in the surveys (Spaargaren, 2013, p. 231). The interaction of these two elements, together with the agential power of individuals, is the core of the conceptual framework of the present investigation.

### **2.4.5 *Thread 3: The culture as part of the contextual setting***

In previous sections, the relevance of culture for consumption practices has been framed. However, approaches from the sustainable field lack of a complete understanding of how culture can impact in strategies that can be implemented within different settings. Traditional perspectives on culture tend to be situated as part of the macro level. This has derived in the development of policies that establish rigid notions of norms and values. However, through the practice theory, culture plays a different role. It is framed as a factor that shapes practices but allowing a space to reflect about doings, sayings and relatings with reference to the “pre-existing set of cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-politic conditions” (Nicolini, 2017, p. 104).

One of the aims of studying divestment through the practice theory is to understand how the act of divesting possessions situating it in everyday life. This implies understanding not only the intentions but also the barriers that consumers face when enacting divestment and the reasons for these barriers. For understanding in depth the meanings of an specific culture, “dreams, fantasies, excitement and enjoyments should be considered as constitutive elements [of a practice]” (Campbell, 2006; Sassatelli, 2007, cited in Spaargaren, 2013). The consideration of the cultural dimension of practices is especially relevant as a way to transcend dominant frames on sustainable consumption.

By analysing clusters of practices to which consumption is attached to, divestment reasons can be also framed. The act of consuming a specific type of good (as well as its divestment) can be strongly culturally mediated. Therefore a main element exposed by Spaargaren (2013, p. 243) should be taken into account for incorporating the cultural dimension in the divestment practice: emotional energy. Emotional energy (EE) can be defined as the result of the above-mentioned excitement and enjoyments that the practitioner finds when carrying out a practice (Spaargaren, 2013) The charge of sentiments, beliefs that are produced within the interactions in social life. Consumption practices are charged of EE and potentially, divestment occurs when this

EE vanishes away. The influence of cultural rituals, social interactions within the context, without any doubt has an influence on divestment practices.

#### **2.4.6 Thread 4: The person within a Practice Theory framework**

Theories of practice can vary in the way in which they take the human agency into consideration (Nicolini, 2012 cited in Spaargaren et al., 2016, p. 62). Even though the present study analyses divestment through the practice theory lens, it also acknowledges that the consumers have a set of pre-conditions under which they exert their agency through divestment. In recognition of the influence that the context (social and material) have in divestment practices, a proposal for analysing the category of the consumer as a "unit" has been adopted: "rather than being individual-focused and choice-based, their actions are seen as routines learnt over time in spatially and temporally defined social contexts (Piscicelli et al., 2016, p. 41)

Consumers (ergo, divestors) have agency in their consumption and divestment processes. In other words, they configure their routines and arrange their decisions according to different personal agendas. A relevant component within the process of how practitioners (consumers and divestors) configure their practices is the construction of a lifestyle. As previously explained, consumption has been considered one of the mechanisms through which an identity is created in contemporary societies. Warde (2014, p. 237) links practices with routines more than with activities. Lifestyle has been considered as a "social routine that helps to create self-identity" (Mont and Heiskanen, 2015, p. 33). It is within this process of adopting specific lifestyles that culture and the person interact and negotiate with the aim of giving meaning to isolated actions.

A central characteristic of a lifestyle is the capacity of comprising narratives that help people to affiliate *to* and differentiate *from* others (Mont and Heiskanen, 2015, p. 41). Even though the relationship between lifestyle, identity and consumption has been studied previously, narratives on divestment and the creation of self-identity through these routines have not been investigated in a detailed way. Hence, as opposed to the modernist perspective of human -as a self-contained being- (Sampson, 1989, p. 915) an integrative conception of the person, expands the boundaries of agential conceptions in divestment.

The ideas generated around the agents from the practice theories agree with the fact that people are carrier of practices and they are " neither autonomous nor the

judgmental dopes who conform to norms: they understand the world and themselves, and use know-how and motivational knowledge, according to the particular practice” (Warde, 2005, p. 143). For divestment studies, it is still not clear the process of understanding what is the scope of action for practitioners within specific conditions. For this reason, further research can contribute to a better understanding of how, when and why agents carry out any particular practice.

Theories of practices in consumption have also acknowledged that the single individual is a "carrier" (Warde, 2005, p. 134) in the form of the bodily and mental agent. This concept situates the agent in a social space and integrate the notion of interaction within the context in which practitioners are situated. It is a fact that the individual might be conceived as the creator of her/his own identity. However, aspirations and values are constantly in negotiation with the context. Social routines also contribute to the creation of the self-identity, "they comprise not only material possessions but also patters of time use" (Lorenzen, 2012, cited in Reisch and Thøgersen, 2015, p. 41). In other words, social narratives help to understand the interconnectedness of consumption and divestment practices.

Even though this model comprises more complex concepts, those explained herein are the ones that can contribute to a better understanding of the concept of *agency* within the divestment process since they account for three elemental aspects of divestment: its social character, its leading role in the configuration of identities and lifestyles (together with consumption) and, its recognition of the contextual factors as an important component of human acts.

## **2.5 Introduction to countries through national accounts**

In order to highlight the contextual elements that are part of the divestment process, two units of analysis have been selected as cultural units in order to recruit data and compare findings. These two countries are Mexico and the United Kingdom.

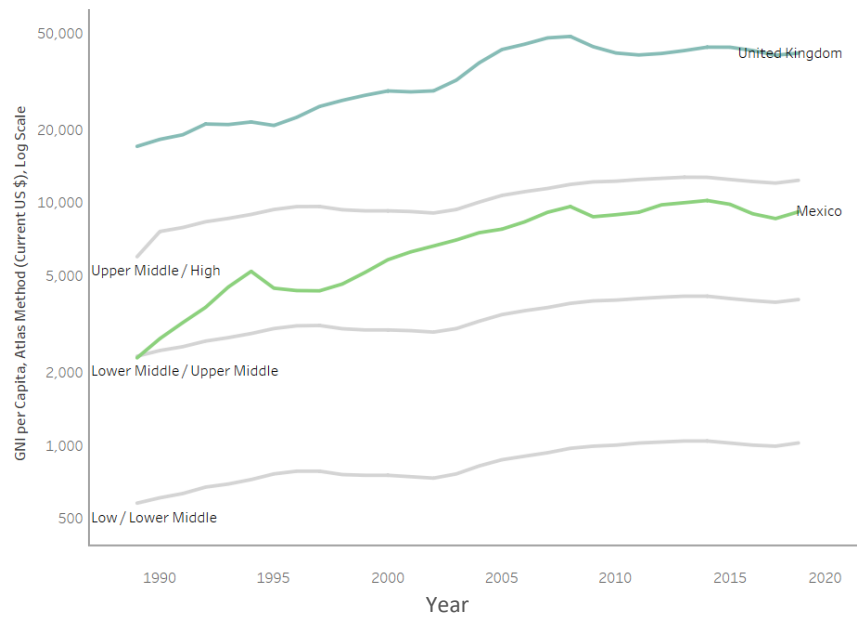
Even though there were practical reasons involved in the consideration of using the United Kingdom and Mexico as units for the present study, such as feasibility of data collection, both countries, Mexico and the United Kingdom were validated as a fertile ground for the study. After analysing the cases, the decision of carrying out the research in both countries was validated under different criteria to ensure sufficient differences to highlight the contextual factors and enough similarities to assure comparability.

Countries, as cultural units, provide the context of the study in order to increase the knowledge on the topic. In this section, both countries will be presented through national accounts. To have this contextual background also contributes to develop “sensitivity to structural conditions that contribute to participants’ responses and to the interpretations of situations informed by experiences, by validation of perceptions, and by a careful review of existing knowledge (Im et al., cited in Liamputtong, 2010, 1256). Although national differences are out of the scope of the present study and, in order to provide a background for the research, this section presents relevant national indicators that will help to create a solid background before analysing survey results.

Two main categories of national accounts are shown: those linked to economic development and those related to sustainability. In terms of economic indicators, this section will present national income and some consumption indicators. For their part, sustainability aspects will be presented through environmental indicators to explore the general landscape within this matter; this includes: ecological footprint, waste generation per capita and recycling rates.

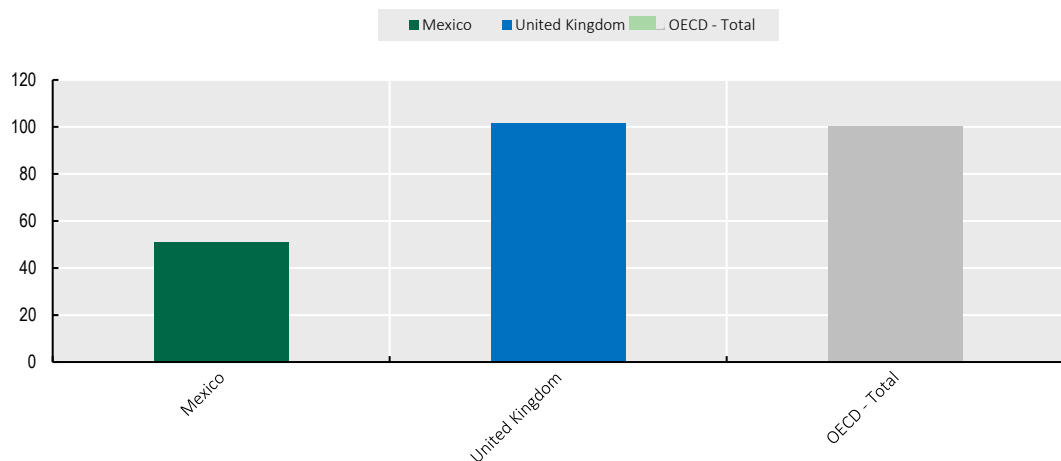
### **2.5.1 Economic indicators**

Mexico and the United Kingdom have been classified as to belong to different categories of income levels. According to the World Bank data, Mexico is classified as an Upper-middle income, whilst the United Kingdom is a High-income country (Figure 2.7). Although there is no conclusive information in this matter, economic growth is categorised as an important factor in driving or enabling improvements in different dimensions of wellbeing such as supporting material living standards, health, education and assisting governments to deliver economic, social and environmental objectives (Everett et al., 2010, p. 13). Hence, two countries with different income accounts are arguably different in terms of consumption and environmental conditions on a macro level.



**Figure 2.7.** Classification of countries by income (GNI per capita).  
Source: World Bank Organisation (2019).

In terms of consumption, Mexico and the United Kingdom present differences in household final consumption, which comprises all expenditures of resident households to buy food, clothing, housing services, energy, transport, durable goods, and leisure. which covers all purchases made by households residents. Figure 2.8 shows that the United Kingdom spends more than the OECD average whilst Mexico expenditure is 45% of the OECD total. This indicator is relevant to portrait a macro-perspective on consumption in both countries.



**Figure 2.8.** Household final consumption per capita.  
(OECD Total=100% / ppp 2012)  
Source: OECD (2014b, p. 40).



Regarding the types of private final consumption (Figure 2.9), countries have certain similarities in the percentage they spend on clothing, furniture, household equipment and maintenance. Larger differences are located in the field of recreation, restaurants and hotels and in the field of food and beverages. Hence, even when in total household expenditures both countries present great differences, in the type of consumption they have similarities in the amount of money spent in durable goods, which provides a factor of comparability for the study.



**Figure 2.9.** Private final consumption expenditure by type 2013.  
 % of GDP (per capita).  
 Source: OECD (2015a, p. 79).

## 2.5.2 Sustainability Indicators

For tracing how each country is doing in terms of sustainability, four indicators have been selected: ecological footprint per capita, waste generation per capita, material consumption and recycling rates (Table 2.8). These indicators are presented with the aim of portraying the situation on each country on a macro level perspective.

**Table 2.8.** Environmental indicators by country (latest year available).

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Mexico</b>	<b>United Kingdom</b>	<b>World Average/ OECD Total</b>
<p><b><i>Ecological footprint</i></b></p> <p><i>How many earths would we need to keep the living standards of the country?</i></p>	1.6 earths	2.68 earths	1.69 earths <i>World average</i>
<p><b><i>Waste generation per capita per year</i></b> (2013)</p>	360 kg	494 kg	522 kg <i>OECD Total</i>
<p><b><i>Recycling rate</i></b> (2013)</p> <p><i>Recycled percentage of total solid waste generated</i></p>	5%	43%	34% <i>OECD Total</i>
<p><b><i>Material Footprint per capita (2017)</i></b></p> <p><i>It accounts for fossil fuels and other raw materials (in tonnes) extracted globally and used in a particular country.</i></p>	8.71tonnes	22.11 tonnes	25.30 tonnes <i>OECD Total</i>

Sources: OECD (2015a), Global Footprint Network (2019); United Nations (2019); OECD (2019).

From this data it can be concluded that, in terms of sustainability indicators, the United Kingdom has a bigger environmental impact compared to Mexico. This also confirms the rule that the income (measured in GDP) increases consumption and waste generation.

There is a significant higher recycling rate in the United Kingdom (43%) than in Mexico (5%). From this data it could be inferred that in terms of environmental actions, the United Kingdom might be more proactive in this area. However, under the premise that recycling activities are linked to infrastructures, the implications of these difference should be treated with caution. This topic will be further addressed in sections 4.1.3 and 5.5.2. taking the participants of this study as the case.

In addition, according to these indicators Mexico has less environmental impact in terms of waste generation, ecological and material footprint. However, as with recycling rates, this assumption should be handled with caution when analysed in particular. Some other factors playing in the meso and micro-level can emerge while analysing the particular aspects in the practices of divestment in both countries.

Overall, this data has contributed to generate a frame that works for contextualising the research, taking into consideration that consumption, as it could be with divestment is affected in different levels. National accounts can give a brief review that works to assure the comparability between both countries and, at the same time, for not losing sight of the structural differences that might be affecting divestment practices.

## **2.6 Summary**

Sustainable consumption challenges are complex. How in present times should we reflect upon material possessions and consumers that are constantly transforming? The response to this interrogation comes by understanding consumption as a process that is linked to other practices in society and that provides a space for human interactions and the definition of the self in contemporary societies. Therefore, the theoretical approach for this research has been constructed under an integrative perspective built upon the practice theory.

In the field of sustainable consumption, it has been traditionally argued that the acquisition stage is the one that should receive more attention since, by reducing consumption, problems linked to resources usage and waste generation would be solved. However, being this a simplistic view of the consumption process and

considering the important that other stages have for sustainability, more contemporary proposals have been made (Gregson et al., 2007b; Evans, 2019) arguing that there is more than “front end” problems (Hetherington, 2004, cited in Evans, 2019, p. 506) in consumption. Consumption for this study includes, not only the purchase or acquisition of material goods. It also includes use and divestment stages.

The agency in divestment refers to how and according to what conditions divestors deploy their practices. Instead of positioning the consumers as the endpoint in the distribution of goods, they can have a determinant role for sustainable consumption if they are seen as agents that have the potential of facilitating more sustainable ways of divestment.

For many topics, problems in contemporary societies, psychological approaches that emphasise the individual aspects of life might give a plausible explanation. However, acknowledging the fact that divestment process is an intersection of micro, meso and macro environments, an individualist perspective might not help to comprehend the process of divestment in depth.

As described previously, research in the field of lifespans and their implications on sustainable consumption has occupied mainly for issues caused by the production and the acquisition of goods, obscuring the implications of the intertwined links of consumption and social practices in contemporary lifestyles. As a consequence, little is known about the impact of post-acquisition stages on lifespans and their implications for sustainable consumption, particularly the divestment stage. This thesis seeks to contribute to redress these knowledge gaps.

The complexity of studying divestment lies in the fact that it is a point of cultural, economic, societal and environmental intersections executed by an individual that is embedded in a community operating under with pre-configured networks. Divestment, is impacted by cultural and societal factors. Therefore, the unit "person" can explain better the practice of divestment since it comprises how individuals are in a specific setting while executing any determined activity. Understanding the configuration of the person within a social environment also helps to elucidate what is the role of practitioners within the divestment processes and which are contextually dependent.

The value of these differences lies in the fact that, in terms of practices of consumption, these unites can provide new data on how these differences impact in other moments of consumption. In general terms, to present national statistics for both countries has the aim of portraying a macro-perspective on environmental and consumption indicators. This creates the baseline to start the analysis process.

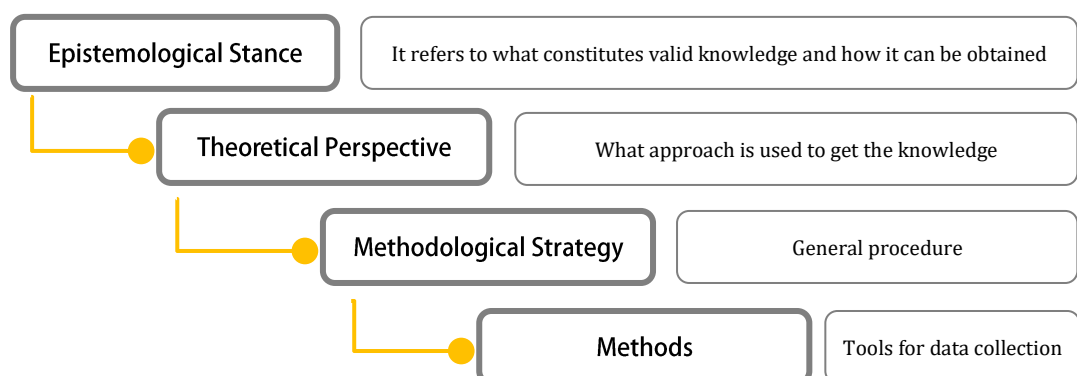
## Chapter 3. Methods

This chapter presents the methodological strategy used to address the research questions. First, it presents an overview of the basic elements that constitute the research project. Then, it explains the epistemological paradigm to which this study subscribes. Finally, it describes the research design, presenting also the research tools that were used in both, quantitative and qualitative strands of the study and how they purposely fulfil the research objectives.

### 3.1 Methodological strategy: epistemological stance and research design

The first section on this chapter explains the different levels that were considered in the research design for this study. Prior to describing the methodological strategy, the study will be framed in a particular epistemological position and a theoretical perspective. Subsequently, the methodological strategy will be presented followed by general procedure of data collection and the interpretative framework.

There are four levels that have to be considered for a research project: (i) epistemological viewpoint, (ii) theoretical perspective, (iii) methodological strategy or procedure and (iv) methods and tools for the data collection (Figure 3.1). In this chapter, these four levels are presented in order to explain how each level is addressing the aims of this investigation.



**Figure 3.1.** Basic structure of the research.

### 3.1.1 Epistemological stance of the research

The concept of paradigm is used to describe the origin and nature of human knowledge, it is also “a basis for understanding the nature of reality” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 19). When doing research, the object of study can be investigated under different perspectives. For social research, there are five different paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism and participatory (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Each one of these paradigms (Table 3.1) has a particular viewpoint of how knowledge is generated, laying out a specific ontological and epistemological frame. Defining the epistemological paradigm to which an investigation is affiliated provides the framework for designing the methodological strategy and gathering data and it is also the basis for a consistent data treatment.

**Table 3.1.** Basic beliefs of inquiry paradigms.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Positivism</b>	<b>Post-positivism</b>	<b>Critical Theory et al.</b>	<b>Constructivism Interpretivism</b>	<b>Participatory</b>
<b>Ontology</b>	Naïve realism – “real” reality but apprehensible	Critical realism - “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible	Historical realism –virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystalized over time	Relativism – local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities	Participative reality – subjective-objective reality, co-created by mind and given cosmos
<b>Epistemology</b>	Dualist/objectivist; findings true	Modified dualist/objectivist; critical tradition/community; findings probably true	Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings	Transactional/subjectivist; created findings	Critical subjectivity in participatory transaction with cosmos; extended epistemology of experiential, propositional, and practical knowing; co-created findings
<b>Methodology</b>	Experimental/manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods	Modified experimental/manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypotheses	Dialogic/dialectic	Hermeneutical/dialectical	Political participation in collaborative action inquiry; primacy of the practical

Source: Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 111).

The present study subscribes to the constructivist and interpretivist paradigm since the aim is to gain knowledge about social dynamics, actors' interactions with the world and their experiences within the consumption spectrum. Hence, this logic of enquiry allows to approach the research question assuming that "realities are taken to exist in the form of multiple mental constructions that are socially and experientially based, local and specific, and dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them" (Guba, 1990, cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. 120). Therefore, the role of the researcher is to make sense of these processes through the elucidation of how meanings are constructed and embodied by social actors (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221).

Traditionally, the positivist and post-positivist approaches consider that there is a correct single truth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. 120), which makes them more common for hard sciences than to social and cultural studies. The complexity and dynamism of social reality is hard to capture through these paradigms (Seale, 2018, p. 23). Hence, a constructivist paradigm allows to unveil people's interactions in the social world, assuming that knowledge is not discovered but socially constructed. The interpretivist paradigm, as stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 99) supports the elaboration of more informed and sophisticated reconstructions about the subject. Therefore, with the aim of contributing to the body of knowledge on divestment as part of the consumption spectrum, this study has focused on daily interactions of humans and objects interrelating in the social world in order to understand meanings and capture the subjectivity of these experiences. By doing this, the possibility of giving the knowledge the role of catalyst for action or social changes, which is essential to achieve a sustainable future.

### **3.2 Considerations for the Methodological Strategy**

Several studies have investigated consumption and its implications for sustainability, however, there is a tendency to situate these studies under individualistic perspectives that generally overemphasise attitudes, behaviours and personal choices of individuals (Evans, 2019, p. 502). More innovative approaches to consumption have already pointed out that, by relying exclusively on individualist approaches might bias the understanding of the problem, causing a gap in the knowledge and the possibilities for generating different consumption dynamics.

One of the most prominent discussions in the field of sustainable consumption is related to the centrality given to individualist perspectives. The intention-action gap is arguably linked to the fact that studies on ethical consumption have been dissociating the individuals and their everyday life to study human behaviour. This issue eventually led to an oversimplification of consumers, generating a misconception of what are the alternatives for encouraging more sustainable ways of living. Some examples of the intention-action gap are found in studies of consumption (Young, et. al, 2009, cited in Nguyen et al., 2019, p. 121) found that while 30% of UK citizens declared to be concerned about the environment, they struggle to engage in green purchases.

To generate a broader picture of divestment activities and its implications for sustainability a more integrative approach is needed. The present investigation contributes to this objective in the sense that, by positioning divestment as a social practice, instead of analysing it as an isolated individual decision, this study highlights the relevance of the context for both, practitioners and practices.

Another relevant factor that helped to design the methodological strategy for the study is based on the fact that, recent studies have pointed out how cultural factors might have an influence on sustainable practices (Evans and Jackson, 2008; Spaargaren, 2013; Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014). The assumption that sustainable consumption strategies can have universal applicability has also created difficulties in the effectiveness of changes implemented in frameworks and policies. Finally, by studying consumption through divestment practices, it is possible to expand the knowledge and recognise other challenges that have been overlooked in order to promote more sustainable consumption patterns.

For all the above mentioned, the methodological strategy considered three main principles that guided the selection of methods and tools for data collection and analysis:

- To increase the knowledge in the intention-action gap: decentre the individual choice as the most relevant activity among the sustainable practices in the consumption spectrum.
- To explore the relevance of post-acquisition stages for sustainable consumption by focusing in divestment practices and their implications.
- To acknowledge the knowledge gap related to cultural aspects which lies in the assumed universality of sustainable consumption principles through situating divestment as a practice linked to a sociocultural setting (context).



### **3.2.1 Mixed methods as a research strategy**

The complexity of consumption has been acknowledged by different fields of research. As discussed in Chapter 2, the division of consumer studies in the micro or the macro perspective creates difficulties in observing how and to what extent the process of consumption is complex. Studies on divestment seem to face the same type of challenges. In chapter two, it was discussed that most of the divestment studies have focused in the channels for divestment and only to a lesser extent on the social aspects of it. Hence, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of divestment, it becomes necessary to develop a methodology that captures the different layers of the divestment processes.

To this end, the methodological strategy for this study follows a mixed methods approach. This perspective is defined as “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study” (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Divestment, studied from the practice theory perspective, seeks to provide insights for the interaction between the agent and the structure and the dynamics within contemporary lifestyles.

Traditionally, positivist and post-positivist perspectives are associated with the use of quantitative methods; whilst the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms have been linked to the qualitative ones (Seale, 2018, p. 23). However, when combined, mixed methods provide the flexibility to this study by using multiple resources from both perspectives to answer the research question. Thus, instead of limiting the choices of the research to one or another paradigm, the mixed methods approach recognises the centrality of the research aims.

Another reason for using a mixed-methods design had the aim of doing a purposeful sampling through the quantitative stage, which was employed to identify cases with specific characteristics that are relevant for the study and identify those cases from questionnaires for an in-depth follow up (Patton, 2002, cited in Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 84).

The mixed methods approach offered different advantages for this investigation. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p. 21), the use of mixed methods: (i) provides stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence and corroboration of findings, (ii) adds insights and understanding that might be missed when only a single method is used, and (iii) qualitative and quantitative research used together produce

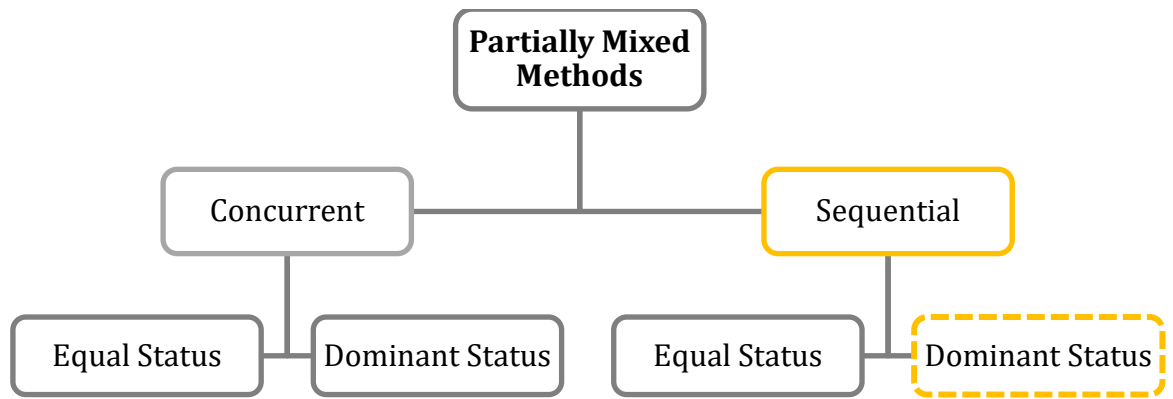
more complete knowledge necessary to inform theory and practice. Hence, this approach allowed the research to explore the interactions of individuals within a specific context and how this shapes their approach to the divestment process.

### **3.2.2 Qualitative Mixed Methods Approach**

Mixed methods can be classified in different types according to how and in which stages the quantitative and the qualitative approaches are used. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) developed a typology of mixed methods research describing them as “a continuum” (p. 267) that goes from fully mixed (those designs that mix different types of data and analysis) to not mixed (monomethod design) with a vast variety of combinations in between.

The first section of this chapter highlighted the importance of understanding knowledge as the constructed meanings of actors, pointing out that the epistemological paradigm that guides the present investigation is the constructivist or interpretivist. Hence, even when the qualitative stage has a central role for addressing the research question, data from the quantitative stage has helped to increase the knowledge around divestment practices and its relation to the consumption spectrum and the implications that it has for sustainability.

According to the typology of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009, p. 269) there are three dimensions that determine the type of mixed methods: mixing dimension, time dimension and emphasis dimension. These variables create the varieties of types of mixed methods (Figure 3.2). The present investigation used the partially mixed sequential dominant status design which implies to run two phases sequentially (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 270). The first stage was quantitative, which was instrumental for the second strand, the qualitative component, which had a greater importance in the study.



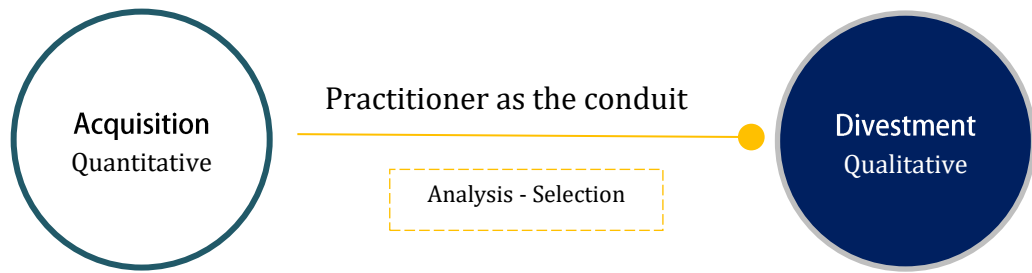
**Figure 3.2.** Mixed methods typology.  
Adapted from Leech, et al. (2009).

Different studies from the social research field have used mixed methods with different purposes. In the case of this study, as mentioned before, the decision of including a quantitative stage before the qualitative one had the aim of incorporating a different moment in the activities of the consumption spectrum. This methodological approach allowed the setting of the foundations for the qualitative stage in which the divestment practices were explore in depth. The sequential mixed methods research provided the framework to address the topic of the oversimplification of consumption and divestment practices derived from studies based on an individualist approach. By giving priority to the qualitative data, the investigation seeks “illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997, cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 600) in the divestment process and its elements.

McMahon (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 461) demonstrated how sequential mixed methods can contribute to any field of knowledge by challenging the *status quo* of a problem<sup>6</sup>. In some fields (as is the case of consumption) the tendency to over rely on quantitative measures hinders the possibility of capturing the complexity of a given phenomenon. Hence, by combining quantitative and qualitative methods, contributions to the debate of the different consumption moments and sustainability can be made (Figure 3.3).

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<sup>6</sup> The study of McMahon is not related to consumption studies, however, Hesse-Biber (2010, p. 461) refers to this research as a successful use of mixed methods in order to build a more complex comprehension of a topic that has been studied under specific paradigms. The case is used as an example of how the study was carried out.



**Figure 3.3.** Mixed methods and moments of consumption.

### **3.2.3 Accounting for the context. The cross-national component**

The aim of this research is to investigate the divestment process and its elements, accounting for the contextual components of it. Therefore, a framework that allows to highlight how the context is part of the divestment practice needs to be addressed. Section 2.4.4 defined the context and how it is “the arena for human activity delimited by the situation and time (Wenworth, cited in Cole, 2003, p. 135). This section also described the relevance of the context not only in terms of geography or economic development but also in terms of culture. The context also represents a cultural unit. Hence, the methodological component that considers the context used as a reference the field of cross-cultural studies.

The term cross-cultural research can broadly be defined as one that compares different cultures, “it can be applied to different types of research: comparisons of whole societies and their more or less distinct cultures, the individuals in them, or something else, such as the economies of those societies” (Minkov, 2013, p. 2). In this type of studies, “data are systematically collected and analysed from two or more sociocultural contexts for the purposes of making comparisons between groups on a phenomenon of interest” (Schrauf, 2018, p. 1). In the present study, the cross-cultural component was carried out as a comparison between two countries working as cultural units. By understanding the problem from a cross-cultural perspective, it is acknowledged that there is a need for understanding divestment practices emphasising the role of culture in these activities. The cross-cultural component will help to understand which elements of the practice are linked to the context.

In the cross-cultural research field<sup>7</sup>, three different types can be identified (Baistow, 2000, p. 9): (i) when countries become objects of study: they are the main focus and valued for their own sake; (ii) when countries are studied as units of analysis to find how social phenomena are related to other features of the countries and (iii) when countries are not the primary interest, but they provide the context of the study with the aim of increasing the knowledge on the topic. For this research, the latter perspective was adopted in order to understand divestment practices through nations by highlighting the impact of the contextual factors within each culture. By including the cross-cultural perspective, it is possible to accomplish the following objectives:

- To identify if there should be distinctive features in sustainable discourses from one place to another and, at the same time, understand the generalities or shared concepts despite the contextual differences.
- To determine to what extent a context could be a determining factor when it comes to analyse divestment practices.

Following Schrauf's assertion regarding the use of mixed methods that states that together with the cross-cultural component it "facilitates the integration of both kinds of between-group comparisons", together with the notion that it "accounts to generate a more coherent and comprehensive view of what is shared across groups and unique to each one" (2018, p. 2), taking a mixed methods approach to this study, also corresponds to the research questions. The mixed methods approach corresponds to the research questions of separating elements of divestment practices. For this research, the cross-cultural component will contribute in three main aspects:

- To achieve reliability of comparison criteria: Reliability can be briefly described as "the consistency of the analytical procedures" (Noble and Smith, 2015, p. 34) in the research. Thus, when comparing two different cultural units, a way of establishing parallelisms prior to qualitative data collection, a classification of participants through quantitative data has been held.
- To highlight contextual differences in divestment practices within the two cultural units. By mixing methods, comparability criteria between cultural units

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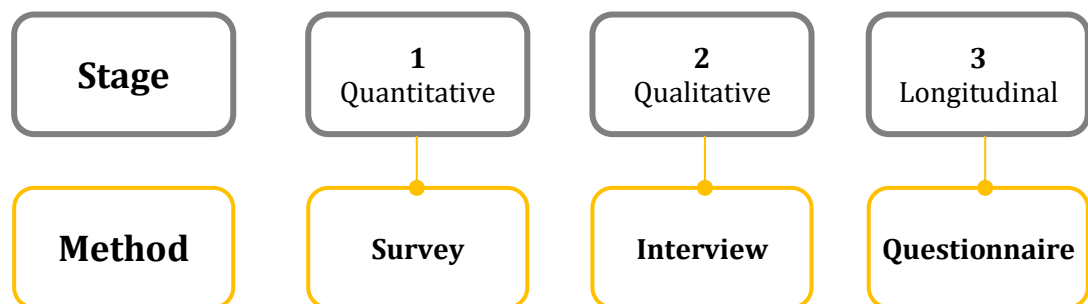
<sup>7</sup> This references uses the term "cross-national research" to indicate that the comparison is between two or more nations. The main differences between the concept of cross-national and cross-cultural rely on the fact that some experts consider that a nation is not a cultural unit. For this study, the countries will be analysed as cultural units. The theoretical foundations for this can be find in Minkov 2013 pp. 25-26.

has been assured since it was possible to establish a parallelism within profiles of participants.

- To develop new knowledge in the consumer studies field by integrating quantitative and qualitative data with the purpose of shedding light on the ethical consumption field.

### 3.3 General procedure

The general procedure of data collection phase was formed by two subsequent phases: quantitative stage and qualitative stage (Figure 3.4). These phases comprise three moments of data collection in which specific methods and techniques were designed in order to get the information needed. As previously mentioned, a sequential mixed-methods qualitative dominant model was used.



**Figure 3.4.** General procedure of methodological strategy.

A pilot study was conducted prior to the first stage of data collection, including four participants in total. In addition to help to improving the tools for the data collection, the pilot study unveiled the need for adding another cultural unit in order to fulfil the aim of defining how the contextual factors shape the divestment process.

Cultural units used for the research were Mexico and the United Kingdom. In order of keeping symmetry in the data collection stage, the recruitment of participants was conducted through two educational institutions: University of Leeds in the United Kingdom and Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes in Mexico. The invitation was sent by email through different departments to assure arbitrariness in the sample.

The quantitative stage of the study consisted of an online survey that was conducted to categorise participants according to their attitudes, behaviours and behavioural intentions towards ethical purchases prior to selecting participants for the second stage. Four different groups were made, classifying participants from the most ethical consumption behaviours and attitudes to the most indifferent ones.

One of the advantages of mixed methods is the flexibility they provide in order to increase a field of knowledge by analysing different facets of any given subject. In this case, the survey helped to classify the participants in order to follow their practices from the consumption stage to the divestment. Hence, The decision of including a survey to classify participants according to their declared attitudes and behaviours towards environmental reasons is based on the fact that some studies have already expressed how this is insufficient to reflect a change in daily practices of consumption and divestment: “most people do not leave up to the promises that the make in the surveys” (Spaargaren, 2013, p. 231). However, a research that compares the individual attitudes in acquisition stages and the ones in divestment would help to increase the knowledge of motivations and rationale behind practices in consumption moments.

Another reason for including the survey as part of the methodology was based on the fact that the research required a platform to evaluate, in a quick and simple way the attitudes and behaviours of participants and then be able to theorise about, in the bigger picture, the practices of divestment. Nicolini (2017b, p. 26) proposes that, to understand a practice in depth one of the strategies is to “zoom in” and “zoom out” to discern elements in practice from a spatial point of view. Suggesting some strategies, he explains how practice in time and space can give a better understanding of a social phenomenon: “the study of how individual practices emerge and disappear”. By including the survey, the aim was to observe the problem from a broader perspective by “zooming-out” to capture acquisition and “zooming-in” in the divestment practices.

The qualitative stage started once data was collected through the survey and participants were classified according to their results. This phase is mainly based upon Photo-Elicitation Interview method (Harper, 2002). The aim was to undertake the first approach to the participants by using two main elements: pictures taken by the participants and interview. For this stage, three categories of products were used as units of observation in order to follow participants’ experiences in divestment practices. Finally, derived from the interview results, the last data collection was carried out through a semi-qualitative questionnaire designed using the same units of observation. This stage was added in order to increase validity in the collected data by incorporating a longitudinal component to the study.

The last stage of the study consisted in the interpretation of results. This stage had the aim of understanding how data from the quantitative stage could shed light on data from qualitative stage and how the combination of both strands can inform the research questions.

### **3.3.1 Units of observation**

The units of observation in research “help to clarify the reasonable conclusions that can be drawn from the information collected” (Lavrakas, 2008). Since the main focus of the research is the process of divestment of durable goods, which constitutes the unit of analysis, three different products were selected as units of observation: clothing, furniture and mobile phones. Defining social practice as the main theoretical perspective for this research has some methodological implications: (i) the individual decision is decentred, people become carriers of the practice (ii) lifestyles become relevant within divestment process (iii) dynamics of practice involve the materiality, hence possessions become relevant to understand practices.

For this research, an individual is considered a part of a big and complex system. Thus, studying practices through individuals’ daily life and their interactions with society, gives an understanding of small pieces that matter when these individualities are collectively considered to represent the larger phenomenon: the divestment practice. That is the reason why the products that have been selected for the research are commonly consumed in contemporary society: clothes, furniture and mobile phones. Household as a context of daily life consumption is an opportunity to create impact through individual changes.

In these products we find the appropriate cultural environment for answering the research questions. As Gibson et al. proposes: “as one of our most everyday habits, disposal depends on a particular kind of blindness that helps us not see, not acknowledge the things we want to be free of. To throw things away is to subordinate objects to human action, it is to construct a world in which we think we have dominion” (Gibson et al., 2013, p. 14). Therefore, divestment patterns can be found in these types of goods because: “this doesn’t just deny the persistent force of objects as material presence, it also denies the ways in which we stay enmeshed with rubbishy things whether we like it or not” (Hawkins, 2006, cited in Gibson et al., 2013, p. 14). The rationale for selecting these units of observation can be summarised in three main aspects:



- The alleged agency that individuals have in these products to have a positive impact in consumption patterns: Inside the consumption sphere, clothing, furniture and mobile phones are closer to what has been traditionally studied as spheres for personal actions towards more sustainable patterns of consumption. This group has been classified as the one in which individuals can generate a positive impact in lifespans of durable goods. Therefore, the agency of an individual would play a prominent role in these categories compared, for example, with public services in which other agents are involved.
- The role that clothing, furniture and mobile phones play in lifestyles dynamics, which generates an adequate setting for studying divestment practices in interaction with other practices. This will also help to systematise conclusion in relation to an item, which previous research on divestment has paid little attention.
- The important part that these products represent in terms of sustainable consumption. Section 1.1 explained briefly the impact of the selected units of observation in the environment not only for their production but also in the disposal stage. Since the aim of the study is to increase the knowledge on post-acquisition stages, in particular divestment, clothing, furniture and mobile phones become relevant units for observing practices of divestment.

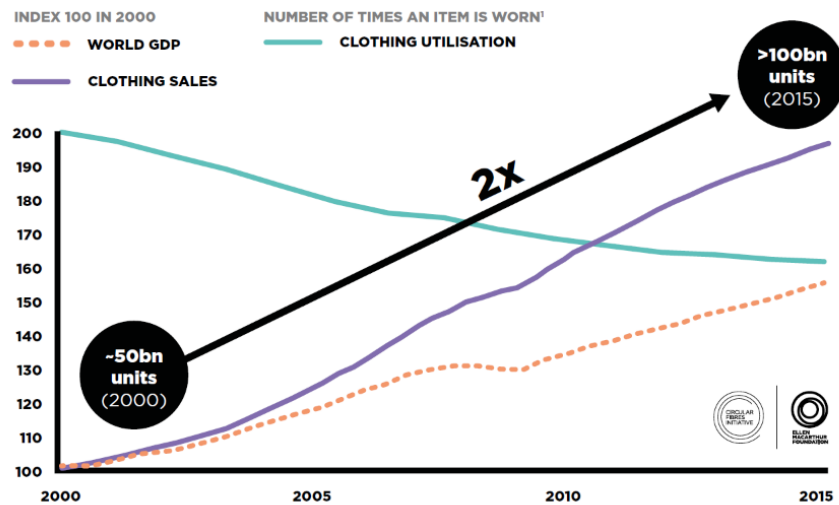
All these factors provided the framework that helped to select strategically the units of observation through which divestment practices are going to be observed.

## **Clothing**

Several studies have investigated the environmental impacts that fashion industry has this activity to resources usage, waste generation and production conditions issues (Ellen McArthur Foundation, 2017; Global Fashion Agenda & The Boston Consulting Group, 2017; Caniato et al., 2012). Clothing sales have been increasing whilst clothing utilisation has decreased (Figure 3.5) highlighting the problems of fast fashion phenomenon and its implications for achieving a sustainable future.

Clothing accounts for up to 14% of total household waste and between 7 and 10% of total ecological footprint (Gibson et al., 2013, p. 39). Most of clothing waste ends up in landfill (Global Fashion Agenda & The Boston Consulting Group, 2017, p. 61) putting in evidence that more sustainable ways of divestment are required. For the

above mentioned, this category represents an opportunity for make clear contributions to the comprehension of the divestment process.

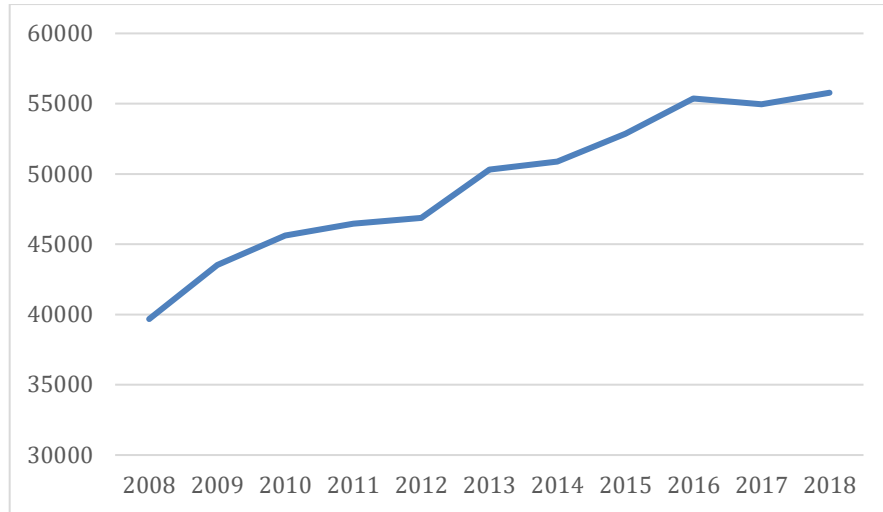


1 Average number of times a garment is worn before it ceases to be used

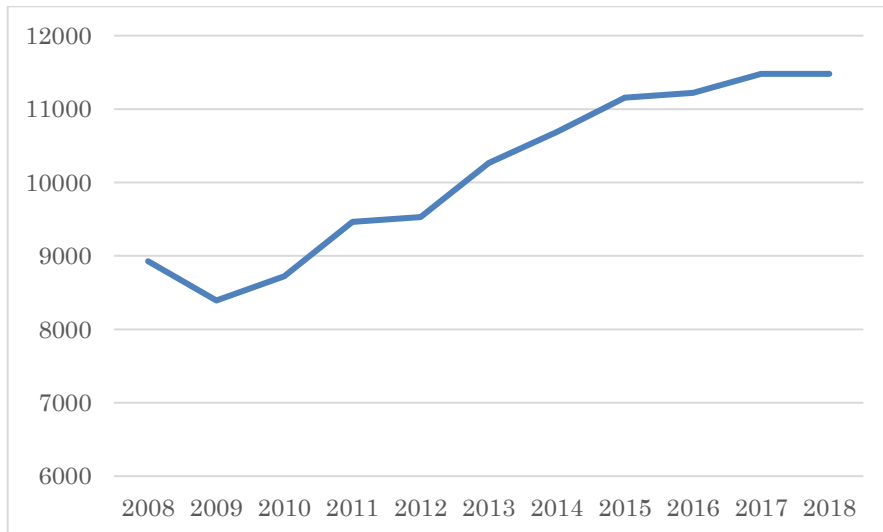
**Figure 3.5.** Growth of clothing sales and decline in clothing utilisation since 2000. Source: Euromonitor International Apparel & Footwear, 2016; World Bank, 2017 in Ellen McArthur Foundation (2017, p. 18).

Fashion is part of many cultural representations and other practices. It is also a way of presenting self-identity to others. This subject will be further explored in chapter 5 but, it is well known that fashion is “a way of marking the body with meaning” (Lane and Gorman-Murray, 2011, p. 25). When it comes to sustainable consumption, clothing is one of the most challenging fields because of the contradictions that it comprises. People find in fashion an endless run of being trendy (accepted), in (included) through the self-identity construction.

The global trend applies also for the countries used for the present study. Consumption of new clothing is estimated to be higher in the UK than any other European country 26.7kg per capita (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2019, p. 40). According to data from OECD (2019) the expenditure on clothing has been increasing in both, the United Kingdom (Figure 3.6) and Mexico.

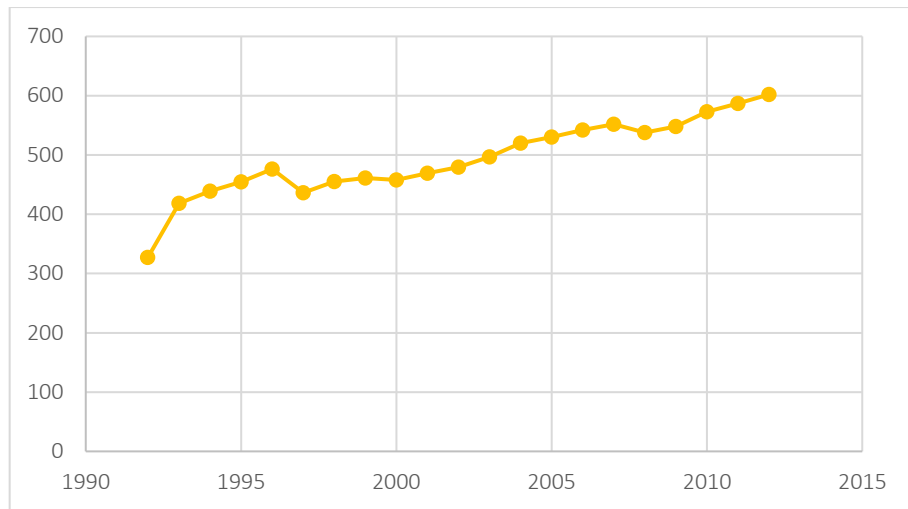


**Figure 3.6.** Expenditure on clothing 2008-2018 in the UK.  
Source: (OECD, 2019)



**Figure 3.7.** Expenditure on clothing 2008-2018 Mexico.  
Source: (OECD, 2019)

Although in Mexico expenditure on clothing is smaller, the recycling rates are very low. According to the Environment and Natural Resources Council (2015) in Mexico only 0.5% of this type of waste is recycled even when the textile waste has been increasing steadily in the last two decades (Figure 3.8).



**Figure 3.8.** Textile waste in Mexico 1992-2012.  
Source: Environment and Natural Resources Council (2015).

## Furniture

The furniture industry is considered as a low environmental impact industry compared, for example, with fashion industry. However, recent studies have shown that furniture industry represents a challenge for environmental issues due to the high amount of processes and materials used in the production chains as well as the of volatile organic compounds involved in them (Azizia et al., 2016, p. 388). Furthermore, it has been estimated that furniture accounted for 27% of households waste (Gibson et al., 2013, p. 83) which represents the highest category within this context.

Another challenge for sustainability coming from the furniture sector is related to changes in contemporary lifestyles and their implications for consumption. The transition of furniture from being perceived as a long lasting good to one that can be replaced and incorporated to the 'fashion cycle' (Gibson et al., 2013, p. 82) implied the growth on demand of these items. Furniture is transforming from being exclusively a functional and long-lasting product to be a fashionable and updatable feature of homes (Leslie and Reimer, 2003). Hence, material culture has to give some answers regarding the disposability and replacement of this type of goods. This phenomenon is worthy of further exploration since furnishing a home might be linked to other practices inside homes.

Finally, because of the constitution of furniture (i.e. the variety of materials, the assembly mechanisms), reprocessing the components results in a problematic task. As is the case with other products, landfilling furniture is the worst treatment option in terms of environmental aspects (Cordella and Hidalgo, 2016, p. 74). Therefore, by studying divestment practices within this category of products can also contribute to generate innovative solutions in the furniture sector.

Less research has been done on furniture-related waste. For Mexico, no statistics were found on how much waste is related to this type of good. In the United Kingdom it has been estimated that 42% of bulky waste is furniture and 20% of this furniture was assessed as re-usable (WRAP, 2012).

## **Mobile Phones**

Mobile phones are one of the most pollutant industries because of the complex manufacture processes and the types of materials that they use: a mobile phone contains over 40 elements of the periodic table among which there are some precious metals. (Kuehr, 2012; Schluep, 2009, cited in Laurenti et al., 2015, p. 284). In Mexico, only 5.1% of electronics and appliances are recycled (Environment and Natural Resources Council, 2015). The number is larger for the United Kingdom (45%). However, other problems have been attached to the e-waste recycling industry since some research (Basel Action Network, 2018) has been investigating the illegal exportation of electronic waste to developing countries, classifying it as recycled.

Mobile phones manufacturing also represents a challenge in terms of production and supply chains since illegal practices among developing countries have increased due to the export of electronic waste (Dwivedy and Mittal, 2012; Nnorom and Osibanjo, 2008; Ongondo et al., 2011; Widmer et al., 2005 cited in Laurenti et al., 2015).

One of the major concerns about this category is the high replaceability in developed countries and its increasing demand in the developing ones. The actual average replacement time of a mobile phone is one or two years (Geyer and Blass, 2010 cited in Gibson et al., 2013, p. 136). Even when the device is functional, the replacement occurs within the above mentioned period of time.

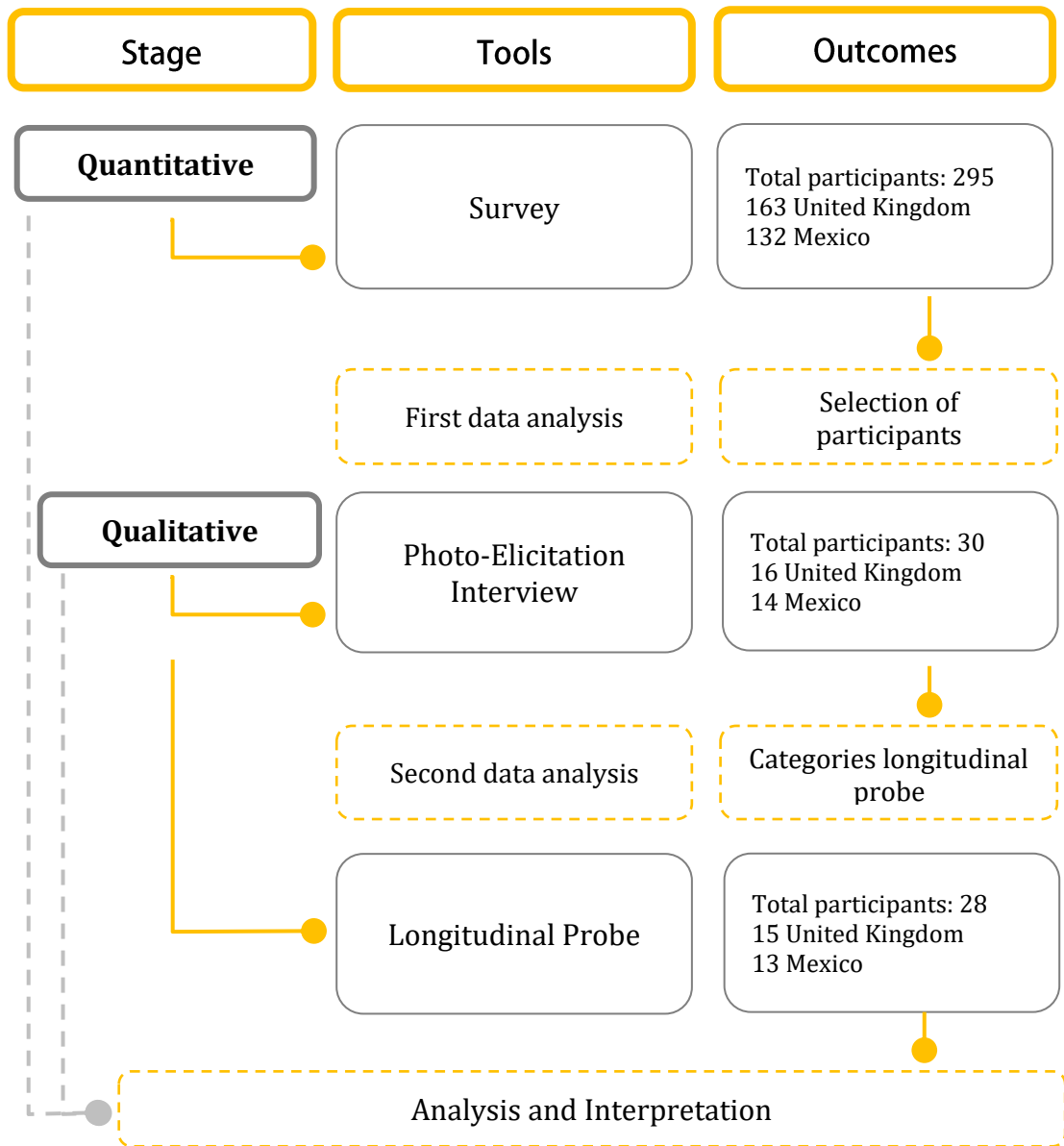
Regarding the challenges for sustainability, as is the case with the other two categories of products, reprocessing components has also contributed to generate new issues. Some studies have explored how informal electronic waste recycling in low-income countries has contributed to the deterioration of the environment and the health

of workers (Ekener-Petersen and Finnveden, 2012; Umair et al., 2013, cited in Laurenti et al., 2015, p. 283).

Attachment to these devices has been also explored by previous studies (Gibson et al., 2013; Vincent, 2006) concluding that these devices represent there is strong emotional attachment and they become in “repositories for memories, sentiments and social connections” (Vincent, 2003, cited in Gibson et al., 2013). Turkle (2008) describes the relevance of this type of attachment says: “inner history shows technology to be as much an architect of our intimacies as our solitudes... through it, we see beyond everyday understanding to untold stories about our attachments to objects (p. 29). Thus, in terms of social practices and environmental challenges, mobile phones provide a range of possibilities in order to understand the needs satisfaction, social practices attached to it and newer concepts such as digital interactions and material agency.

### **3.3.2 Research methods**

The mixed methods approach in this study followed a sequential model, allowing to collect data in three different moments. The main structure can be observed in Figure 3.9. For the quantitative strand, a survey was conducted for recruiting and classifying participants for the second stage. The qualitative strand was carried out through two different moments of data collection: through a photo-elicitation interview and through a semi-qualitative questionnaire designed on the basis of the interview results, adding the longitudinal component to the study.



**Figure 3.9.** Methodological Procedure and outcomes for each stage.

### **Quantitative stage. Survey and participants classification**

The survey consisted in a set of 27 items divided in 4 sections: demographic information, self and personality, activities and habits in daily life -this section included questions about recurrence in environmental actions and ethical purchases- and attitudes towards ethical products. From this set of questions (Appendix A) and according to the predefined profiles, specific scores were designated for each one of the responses.

Since there is a developed body of knowledge around individuals and their decisions towards ethical consumption, this survey was not built from the ground up; it was based on previous works (Department for Environment and Affairs, 2008; Geographic, 2009; GfK, 2011; Bemporad et al., 2012) and helped to group the participants according to self-declared responses. The survey captured three different factors to identify how involved are consumers in sustainability issues:

- Self-reported behaviours: These represent statements that people describe as their behaviours (Minkov, 2013, p. 45). It is related to the things that people declared as, indeed, done.
- Attitudes: Attitude can be defined as a self-declared statement that has the potential of driving actions. It includes what consumers like or dislike; some authors [Irland, 1993; Schwepker and Cornwell, 1991] purchases are frequently based on consumers' environmental attitudes (Chen and Chai, 2010, p. 30)
- Behavioural Intentions: These are commonly studied by asking people what they would do in specific situations (Minkov, 2013, p. 45).

Data was analysed to classify participants into four different groups (Appendix B). These four profiles ranged participants with the higher ethical consumption behaviours and attitudes to the most indifferent ones as follows:

- Authentic greeners: With a dominant concern about the human impact on the environment, they tend to reduce consumption and buy ethical products. They have positive attitudes towards acquisition of products that offer environmental or social benefits. This group also tends to encourage other people to adopt sustainable practices.
- Moderate greeners: Together with their concern about environmental issues, they place personal comfort as a central value. Instead of being exclusively motivated by ecological or social concerns, they feel motivated by comfort, technological developments or any other personal interests that could bring only incidentally environmental or social benefits. Their knowledge about environmental problems could be vast, but it is not their main consumption driver.
- Pragmatic: Direct and circumstantial inputs mostly drive this group. They base their decisions on previous knowledge, price, quality, proximity and motives that are relevant for them. Hence, environmental and social benefits in purchases tend to be a secondary concern.



- Detached: This group do not exhibit any concern about environmental and social issues; instead, they prioritise individual concerns. Their actions have a higher environmental impact – compared with the other three groups – even though their knowledge about environmental issues can be commensurate with any of the other categories. However, their decision of not being engaged with sustainability can have different roots: low perceived impact, disappointment on the system, or lack of knowledge.

These profiles were the guide for classifying participants. However, it is noteworthy that these profiles present different nuances and cannot be conceived as an absolute. Groups were constructed as “ideal types” that “are not descriptions of reality: they are the tools used to analyse it (Bauman, 2007, p. 27).

Participants were classified as belonging to upper or lower scores in response to the survey results. Subsequently, an invitation was sent by email to those who had the specific score, starting with the closest to the ideal profiles. Then, a second round of invitation was sent until the number of participants required for each group was completed. The next stage of the research started by selecting participants with the aim of capturing the four profiles in both countries, aiming to recruit at least 3 participants per profile per country (24 in total).

### **Qualitative stage. Photo-elicitation interview**

The qualitative data was collected using the Photo-elicitation Interview method (Harper, 2002). The reason for using this method is related to the power that it has to evoke memories and feelings due to the parts of the brain that it activates: “the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionary older than the parts that process verbal information” (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Therefore, it allows more precise information to be obtained compared with in-depth interviews (Appendix C). Also, another benefit is that photo-elicitation interviews provides deeper information. It has been stated that “compared with traditional interviews, those involving photo-elicitation produce deeper interviews, based on the notion that photographs elicit precise and at times even encyclopaedic information and “can trigger responses that might lie submerged in verbal interviewing” (Collier, 1957, cited in Van Auken et al., 2010, p. 375). In the case of the present research this method was carried out in two stages:

1. Photographs: Participants were asked to take a series of photographs prior to the interview (Table 3.2). The researcher gave the participants a description of photos that were needed. Then, these photographs were used in the interview session.
2. Interview: In sessions of 60 minutes approximately, the researcher enquired deeper about divestment experiences of participants by using the requested photographs to go through each one of the units of observation.

This type of interview tends to be more closed, as the method describes: “the narratives emerging from the interviews are sources of rich information and potential insights about the user’s experiences” (Kumar, 2013, p. 113).

**Table 3.2.** Photographs participants were asked to take prior to interview.

Item	Unit of Observation	Description
A	Clothing	Most recently acquired piece of clothing
B	Clothing	Cherished/meaningful outfit owned
C	Clothing	Piece of clothing to be discarded
D	Furniture	More recently acquired piece of furniture for the living room
E	Furniture	Cherished/meaningful piece of furniture owned
F	Furniture	Piece of furniture to be discarded
G	Mobile Phone	Picture of current mobile phone and its accessories
H	Mobile Phone	Picture of previous mobile phones and their accessories

The reason for requesting different items of the same category is based on the need of finding links between replacement and divestment and see how these activities are (or not) related to each other. Divestment as one of the post-acquisition stages has the possibility to connect with three important moments in consumption: with acquisition stages (through the replacement of goods); with retainment activities and with disposal (waste generation). Hence, including these three different moments in the consumption spectrum, it was possible to address the aim of constructing a taxonomy of divestment. It also corresponds to the research questions of closing the gap between practices of divestment and new acquisitions.

### **The longitudinal component. Semi-quantitative questionnaire**

With the aim of increasing the validity in the results, after analysing the responses of the interview, a new stage of data collection was carried out with the aim of observing how practices of divestment were carried out in a time frame. The photo-elicitation interview asked the participants to select and talk about items that were going to be discarded or that were recently discarded. This information was analysed and helped to design a semi-qualitative questionnaire including the pictures of the items in the category C (ready to be discarded).

After a period of time (between 24 and 18 months) a new form (Appendix D) was sent to the interviewees via email for them to indicate if the intentions of divesting were completed in the previously declared way. In addition of contributing to fill the intention-action gap, this stage also contributed to increase knowledge on the barriers and limitations that participants face in terms of their divestment activities. It also added trustworthiness to the study.

### **3.3.3 Data Analysis**

For analysing data, a set of categories has been defined and established. These categories will guide the analysis process and will help to generate conclusions to address the research aim. These labels derive from the social practice theory, emphasising:

- Practitioners' "sayings": Narratives about divestment
- Practitioners' "doings": Practices and actions around the divestment
- Practitioners' "relatings": How narratives and actions interact within the social world adding a particular meaning.
- How these elements interact to generate the divestment outcome

The focus on divestment as a practice has the aim to understand the process of divestment practice: the intention, the action and the ends of the actor are carried out. We acknowledge that the context is relevant in order to make changes towards more sustainable ways of living. Hence, it is not enough to observe "sustainable consumption" as a universal goal with the same challenges in different times and spaces.

As previously explained, the architectures of practices are relevant up to the point that, without understanding them, it would be very challenging to promote changes in consumption patterns for contemporary societies. Since we know that divestment (and consumption) are not just an isolated act carried out by individuals, the focus on practices gives the opportunity to achieve the aim of the research. In other words, to change the current practices, including consumption and divestment, implies a change “not only what individuals think and how they act but also the discourses through which people understand their world” (Kemmis and Mutton, 2012, p. 188). Therefore, an approximation from the social practice theory to divestment activities is through the individuals involved in these practices.

What is accepted and what is not can be observed by people’s actions. Also, if we observe “culture” as an abstract idea, it would be impossible to understand the underlying reasons behind it. However, if individual actions are observed and interpreted in a cultural context, then is possible to give a detailed explanation through these cultural categories. Some other methods were considered, observation was one of them. Since units of observation are part of a private space, most of the participants were a bit reluctant to the idea, therefore, the photo-elicitation was used in order to capture most of data. Since the aim of the research is to understand practice of divestment from the practitioner perspective, some direct contact with consumers was required, therefore, survey and interview were the tools chosen. Following Spaargaren’s precept on social practice: “the social practices model implies the end of the individual as the central unit of analysis” (Spaargaren, 2004, p. 17)

The strategy used for analysing is the one called *coding*. This activity “provides a means of purposefully managing, locating, identifying, sifting, sorting, and querying data (Bazeley, 2013, p. 125). In order to code all data, NVivo was used to label interview transcriptions and group findings in different topics in order to create a second level of concepts that are used to generate conclusions.

### **3.4 Strengths and limitations of the research strategy**

Since the epistemological stance of the research is constructivism and interpretivism, the conditions for testing quality criteria are based on trustworthiness and authenticity, as well as the catalyst for action factor (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018, p. 112). Therefore, the next section will describe how methods and research techniques have been applied to ensure quality through trustworthiness and adequacy in this research project.

To have a better idea of how quality work in each paradigm, a brief terminology and criteria will be described for both, quantitative and qualitative research (Table 3.3). Concepts as validity, reliability and generalisability are traditionally used in the field of quantitative studies. Since qualitative and quantitative research belong to different epistemological paradigms, qualitative research needs to account for its own way to assure to accomplish trustworthiness and consistency in research. There are different perspectives when it comes to defining these characteristics in qualitative research and how the researcher ensures that these features are covered by the way the research is executed.

**Table 3.3.** Terminology and criteria used to evaluate the credibility of research findings.

<b>Quantitative research terminology and application to qualitative research</b>	<b>Alternative terminology associated with credibility of qualitative research</b>
<p><i>Validity</i></p> <p>The precision in which the findings accurately reflect</p>	<p><i>Truth value</i></p> <p>Recognises that multiple realities exist; the researchers' outline personal experiences and viewpoints that may have resulted in methodological bias; clearly and accurately presents participants' perspectives</p>
<p><i>Reliability</i></p> <p>The consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Consistency</i></li> <p>Relates to the 'trustworthiness' by which the methods have been undertaken and is dependent on the researcher maintaining a 'decision-trail'; that is, the researcher's decisions are clear and transparent. Ultimately an independent researcher should be able to arrive at similar or comparable findings.</p> <li>• <i>Neutrality</i></li> <p>Achieved when truth value, consistency and applicability have been addressed. Centres on acknowledging the complexity of prolonged engagement with participants and that the methods undertaken, and findings are intrinsically linked to the researchers' philosophical position, experiences and perspectives. These should be accounted for and differentiated from participants' accounts.</p> </ul>
<p><i>Generalisability</i></p> <p>The transferability of the findings to other settings and applicability in other contexts</p>	<p><i>Applicability</i></p> <p>Consideration is given to whether findings can be applied to other contexts, settings or groups.</p>

Source: Noble and Smith (2015, p. 34).

The present study ensures credibility within three moments: the process of research design, data collection and data analysis through different strategies. These strategies are comprised in

Table 3.4. The main strategies to add credibility to the research is based on the mixed methods approach. This perspective, according to Greene, facilitates the triangulation, complementarity, development, initiation and expansion<sup>8</sup> (1989, cited in Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003, p. 16). Considering the fact that a “good qualitative study can help us to ‘understand a situation that would otherwise be enigmatic or confusing’” (Eisner, 1991, cited in Golafshani, 2003), data collection systematisation and analysis processes also provide reliability to the study.

**Table 3.4.** Strategies for enhancing the credibility of the research.

<p><b>Truth Value</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflexivity and reflection of own perspectives             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Journal of process for documenting decisions and reflecting upon them</li> <li>- Peer debriefing to assist researcher to uncover biases or assumptions</li> <li>- Pilot stage for collecting feedback from participants to assure relevance and quality of the research tools</li> <li>- Mixed methods strategy allows triangulation and complementarity: this was accomplished by the different stages of data collection that composed the methodological strategy</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Consistency / Neutrality</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieving auditability             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comparability of both cultural units by following a rigorous process of participants selection assuring the symmetry in both countries.</li> <li>- Participants selection for the first and the second stage according to the requirements from framework</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Applicability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application of findings to other contexts             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The cross-national component of the research allows to classify context-dependent from context-independent findings. This way of systematising data collection, findings and interpretations enables the possibility of differentiating from those that are applicable to other contexts and which others are not and what would be required in order to successfully transfer the knowledge in other contexts.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Adapted from Noble and Smith (2015).

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<sup>8</sup> According to this perspective, triangulation and complementarity are linked to the fact that by combining qualitative and quantitative methods help to get multiple inferences that complement each other. The development, initiation and expansion allow to observe a phenomenon from a broader perspective in order to shed light on it.

### **3.4.1 Validity: matching samples in the quantitative stage**

Since the process of classification and selection of participants was performed in two different countries, one of the major concerns was to ensure parallelism in both groups. Cross-cultural studies have indicated two ways to accomplish it: one is the type of studies that use public opinion polls that use statistically representative samples of a specific population; the other is to select groups with similar characteristics in order to assure comparability (Hofstede, 2001, p. 23). The latter is the case of the present research: recruitment was made through two educational institutions in which, invitations were sent randomly to include as much diverse participants as possible within this population.

By following this strategy, it was possible to recruit participants from different age, gender, profession, educational level, yet, same nationality. All these methodological decisions were made in order to meet the required functional equivalence when doing a cross-cultural study. Parallelism requisite is also accomplished by segmenting participants in different groups (consumer profile) which helps to identify patterns or differences within the same group.

### **3.4.2 Limitations of the methodological strategy and answers**

The present research had also limitations in terms of data collection, time and space restrictions, as well as limitations that the methods have in themselves. Acknowledging these limitations that could represent threats to the trustworthiness for the research, allowed to fill the gaps in order to generate interpretations and conclusions framing these limitations. These limitations and the ways in which they were rectified are listed below:

- Self-declared methods for collecting data: It is known that there is a risk when researchers decide to use self-declared research tools such as surveys and interviews. This is the case of the present research. However, there are two components that help to provide validity to this data: the photo-elicitation interview which allow reflection and evidence beyond the words. The second strategy is the longitudinal element which allowed to capture two moments of the self-declared information from participants. The time frame provided to the researcher to assess the veracity of the self-declared information.

- The selection of two cultural units with different income levels: high income economy (United Kingdom) and upper-middle income (Mexico) might have an influence on practices. The process of participants' selection was carried out under the same procedures in both countries in order to keep the symmetry. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of the income difference allowed to frame the interpretation of data in the light of this fact.
- Comparability of divestment practices is allowed in both countries through the functional equivalence, which is obtained through the existence of "similar activities that have similar functions in different cultural settings (Minkov, 2013, p. 87). This study aims to analyse divestment process and its elements. This practice in both countries that has the same function but within different cultural settings. Therefore, by placing this activity in the centre of the research assures the needed equivalence for make the study within a cross-cultural frame.
- Participants as practitioners: It might be perceived as a risk for social practices to obtain information through individuals, having recognised that one of the issues is that individualistic perspectives have originated a bias in the field of sustainable consumption. Nonetheless, the data collection, analysis and interpretation of data have been thoroughly examined in order to put the practice at the centre of the study instead of focusing on individual aspects of the experience. Hence, the practitioner is important for architectures of practice in order to frame the doings, sayings and relatings (Kemmis et al., 2014) in divestment practices. Furthermore, data collection was made with the reflection that the study is not about individuals and their interactions, but interactions and their individuals, not persons and their passion but passions and their persons (Collins, 2004, cited in Spaargaren, 2013).



## **Chapter 4. Quantitative stage. An overall view of cultural units**

This chapter presents the results from the quantitative component of the study which was designed to classify participants according to personal attitudes and actions towards ethical purchases. The survey also allowed to construct an overall representation of both groups of participants in terms of ethical attitudes and behaviours in consumption activities. A detailed report of survey results is presented in this chapter. The last section of this chapter will discuss some key findings from the quantitative stage as well as how data informed the qualitative strand of the research.

### **4.1 Results of quantitative stage**

Previously, Mexico and the United Kingdom were described in terms of national accounts to provide a general landscape of both countries (Section 2.5). Chapter 3 (section 3.3) explained how the quantitative strand of the research had the aim of making a purposeful sampling and to provide comparability between countries and assure reliability on the results. However, data obtained from the survey also contributed to generate an overall picture of both groups in key aspects on sustainable and ethical consumption aspects.

This chapter will present the results of the survey in two main sections:

- An overall picture of participants' declarations on ethical consumption attitudes and behaviours in each country .
- An analysis of the results of the survey items to generate participants' scores. These two sections have the purpose to provide the baseline and the comparability criteria for the study and the selection criteria for the qualitative stage.

Data collection of the quantitative strand was conducted through an online survey sent to staff from the two above mentioned universities, one in Mexico and one in the United Kingdom. The invitation was sent out together with the link to the questionnaire through communication officers from different departments in both institutions. A prize draw of two £50 amazon vouchers was used as an incentive for

participation. The total of respondents was 295: 163 participants in the United Kingdom and 132 in Mexico. Three types of items were included in the survey:

- Sociodemographic data (age, gender, education level, employment status, country of origin)
- A set of questions to situate both groups perceptions on different topics related to sustainable and ethical consumption.
- Items that helped to classify participants according to individual attitudes, behavioural intentions and behaviours towards ethical actions in consumption.

This section has the aim of presenting results of the survey that result relevant for contextualising the study and providing a reference framework as well as a baseline for the qualitative data.

#### **4.1.1 Sociodemographic data**

The first set of questions explored sociodemographic characteristics of participants. Even though this data was used to provide an overview of participants, the correlation between sociodemographic characteristics of participants with their answers was out of the scope of this study. Table 4.1 presents sociodemographic data in four categories: gender, age, education level and employment status.

From the 295 participants, 55.6% are women and 43.4% are men. The majority of participants are aged between 25 and 44 years old, constituting a 69.5% of the total sample; the group aged between 45-54 years old represents a 16.3% of the total and the 10.2% of participants declared to belong to the 55-64 years old group and only 1 participant above 65 years old. The rest of participants decided not to declare their age (3.7%).

**Table 4.1.** Sociodemographic data of participants.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>% Mexico</b>	<b>% United Kingdom</b>	<b>% Total</b>
<b>1. Gender</b>			
Female	50.8	59.5	55.6
Male	46.9	40.5	43.4
Not declared	2.3	0	1
<b>2. Age</b>			
25-34	32.6	41.7	37.6
35-44	36.4	28.2	31.9
45-54	21.2	12.3	16.3
55-64	8.3	11.7	10.2
65-74	0	0.6	0.3
Not declared	1.5	5.5	3.7
<b>3. Education Level</b>			
Secondary	0	5.5	3.1
High School	2.3	5.5	4.1
University	35.6	33.1	34.2
Postgraduate	61.4	55.2	58
Not declared	0.8	0.6	0.6
<b>4. Employment Status</b>			
Student	10.6	20.2	15.9
Part-time job	11.4	9.2	10.2
Full-time job	68.9	69.9	69.5
Self-employed	6.8	0	3.1
Unemployed	0.8	0	0.3
Retired	0	0.6	0.3
Not declared	1.5	0	0.7

Another item explored in the sociodemographic data section was the educational level of participants. Section C in Table 4.1 shows the different levels of education of participants. Participants with a college degree or higher education represent the 92.2% whilst less than 10% have only a secondary or high school degree. In terms of the employment status, 69.5% of participants declared to have a full-time job, 15.9% of participants are students, 10.2% have a part-time job, 3.1% are self-employed, unemployed and retired participants represent the 0.6% of the total, and 0.7% participants decided not to declare their status.

The correlation of sociodemographic variables and ethical consumption seems to be a controversial subject. Previous studies have investigated the influence of sociodemographic variables and its relationship with ethical consumption. Nevertheless, results are still inconclusive: some researchers argue that sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, education level and age are not valid indicators of ethical concern (Schlegelmilch, 1994, cited in McGoldrick and Freestone, 2008, p. 189; Nair, 2015).

The exception for this position relates to the level of education of individuals which seems to be correlated with environmental concern but not pro-environmental actions (Nair, 2015, p. 175; Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002). Even when higher levels of education potentially mean more knowledge about environmental issues, no correlation has been found between the amount of knowledge on the topic and environmentally concerned purchase behaviour since “awareness does not get translated into environmentally concerned purchase behaviour” (Nair, 2015, p. 175). Green purchase intention does not correlate with education (Soonthonsmai, 2001 cited in Chen and Chai, 2010, p. 30). Hence, the fact that the sample was collected from educational contexts when a higher probability of participant with a graduate level of education, should not impact the homogeneity in the results.

In conclusion, most of the research tends to indicate that there is no correlation between any sociodemographic factor and ethical consumption meaning that age, education level or gender are not determinant factor for carrying out ethical consumption practices. The disagreement on this subject can be associated with the fact that these studies have had difficulties in capturing all the factors influencing the consumption practices, which makes the correlation of ethical consumption and sociodemographic data hard to track.

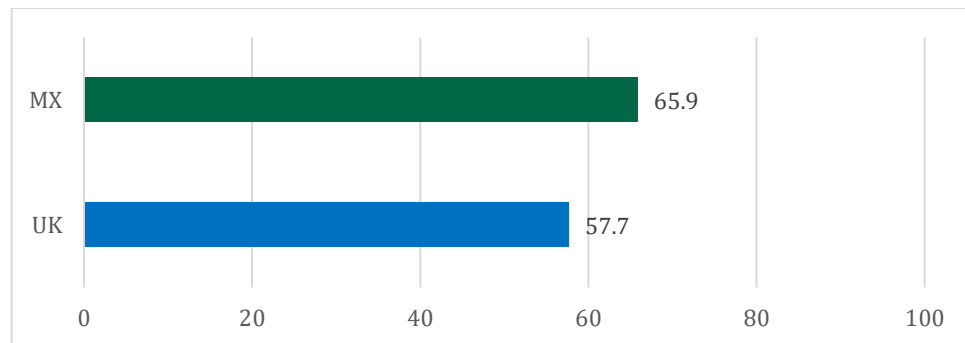
#### **4.1.2 Attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable consumption in the survey**

For this section, a set of items have been analysed to present participants’ responses in specific aspects linked to sustainable consumption. They aim to provide a frame for situating an overall picture of both groups of participants. The items explore the level of engagement that participants declared to have towards reducing their individual environmental impact; their attitudes and knowledge on principles associated to ethical purchases; and, the perception of individual agency to solve environmental issues, as

well as the responsibility they assign to other agencies such as government and industrial sector.

### Level of engagement with environmental practices

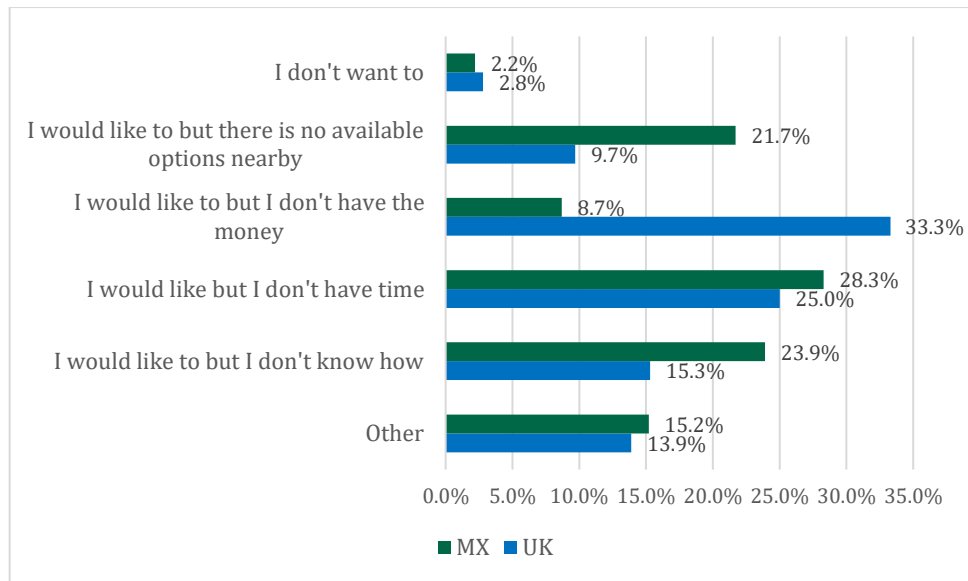
More than half of participants declared to be strongly engaged with reducing their own environmental impact (Figure 4.1). In Mexico the percentage was larger than in the United Kingdom. Participants that declared not to be involved in reducing their environmental impact represent the 34.1% in Mexico and 42.3% in the United Kingdom. Reasons for not doing so were distributed differently in both countries (Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.1.** Percentage of participants who declared to be strongly engaged with reducing their environmental impact.

Figure 4.2 presents the breakdown of the reasons participants declared to have when trying to reduce their environmental impact. In the United Kingdom the most frequent answer was the lack of money (33%) whilst in Mexico it was the lack of time (28.3%). There are significant differences between the two groups in two responses: whilst “not having enough money” was the most frequent answer in the United Kingdom with a 33%, in Mexico the same answer was selected only by the 8.7%.

The absence of available options was another item that showed significant difference between the two groups. The 21.7% of participants in Mexico nominated “not having available options nearby” as their reason for not being committed to reducing their environmental impact whilst in the United Kingdom the same answer was selected by the 9.7% of respondents.



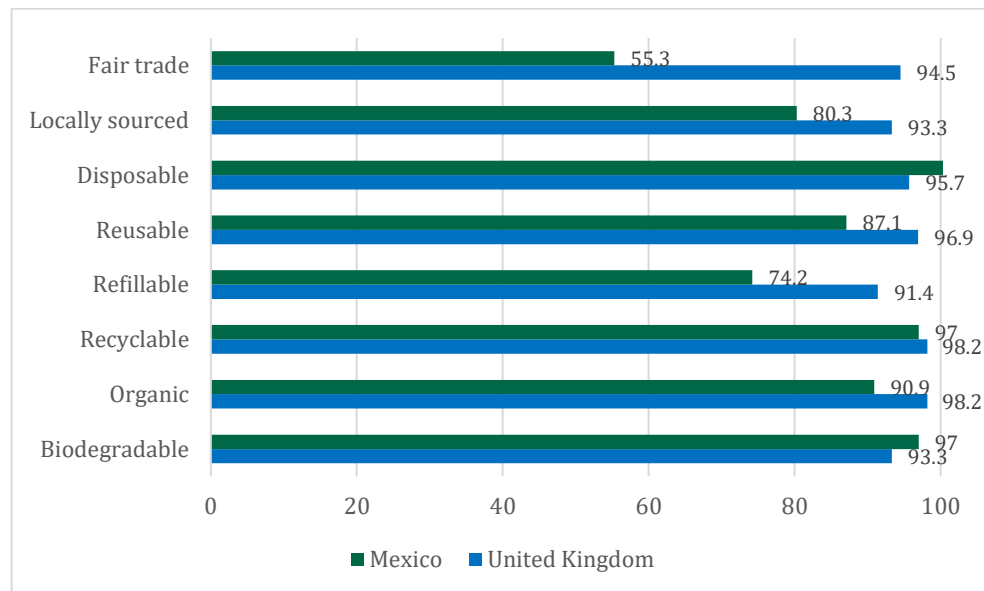
**Figure 4.2.** Reasons for not being engaged in reducing environmental impact.

Participants who declared to have other reasons for not being engaged in reducing their environmental impact (14.4%) chose not to do it because of the perceived low impact of individual actions, considering the economic system as the one who can really reduce substantially the impact of human activities on the environment. Other participants declared to do it as part of their routines but not as a personal engagement. Some others declared that laziness or irresponsibility is their main reason. All these responses captured the variety of individual perceptions on how to contribute from the individual aspect to reduce impact on the environment and what are the aspects that people perceive as their individual limitations.

### 4.1.3 Ethical purchases

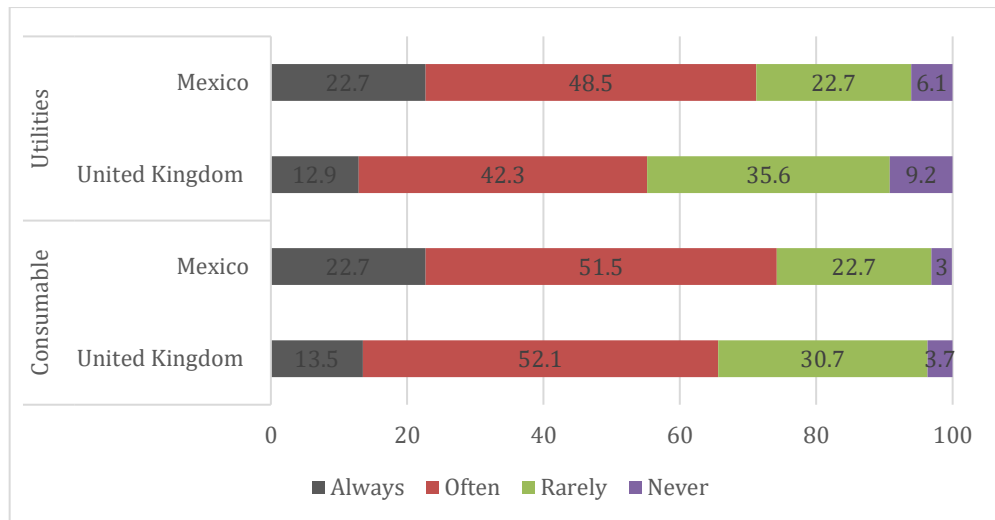
Attitudes, knowledge and behavioural intentions around ethical purchases were explored and the results for these items will be presented here. Both countries showed an understanding of terms commonly associated with sustainable and ethical consumption, as shown in Figure 4.3. Between countries, the largest difference is in the fair-trade products, in which, 55.3% of participants in Mexico declared to be familiar with versus 94.5% in the United Kingdom. The rest of the categories have less than 20% difference between countries.

Overall, the results of this item show that knowledge on labels of environmentally and socially responsible products is similar in both countries. It can be inferred then, that knowledge is not a significant limitation for a pro-environmental behaviour. However, considering that knowledge on environmental issues does not necessarily impacts behaviour.



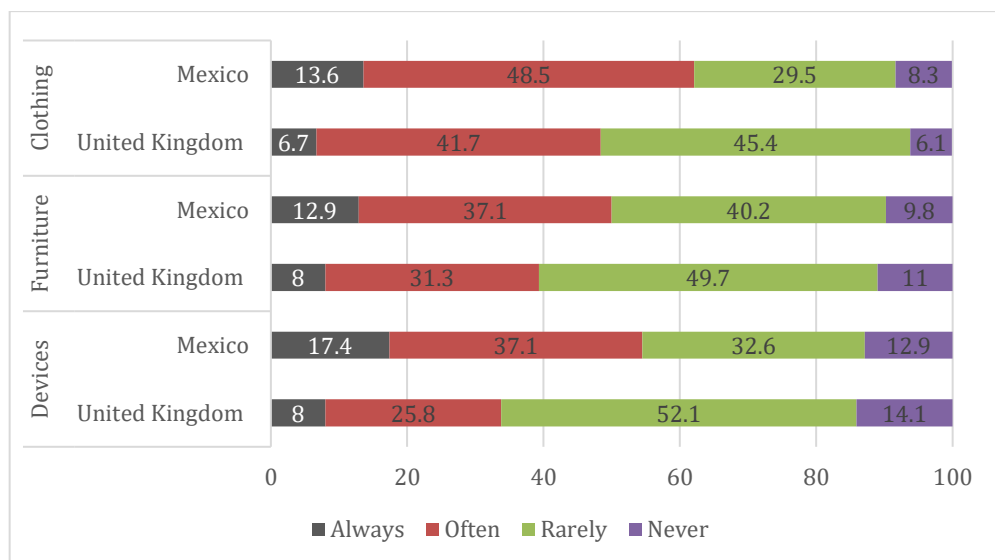
**Figure 4.3.** Percentage of participants that are familiar with terms associated with ethical and sustainable consumption.

In relation to attitudes and behaviours towards ethical purchases, 71.2% of participants in Mexico and 83.4% in the United Kingdom agreed with the fact that reducing consumption levels is needed in order to improve environmental conditions. Interestingly, only a minority of participants declared to consider renting something before buying it: on average, a 68.4% of participants declared to rarely or never consider renting something before buying it. In terms of behavioural intentions, the willingness to pay premium for those products that offer environmental or social benefits was explored in two categories: utilities and consumable goods (Figure 4.4) and in each one of the units of observation: clothing, furniture and technological devices (Figure 4.5).



**Figure 4.4.** Willingness to pay premium in utilities and consumable goods.

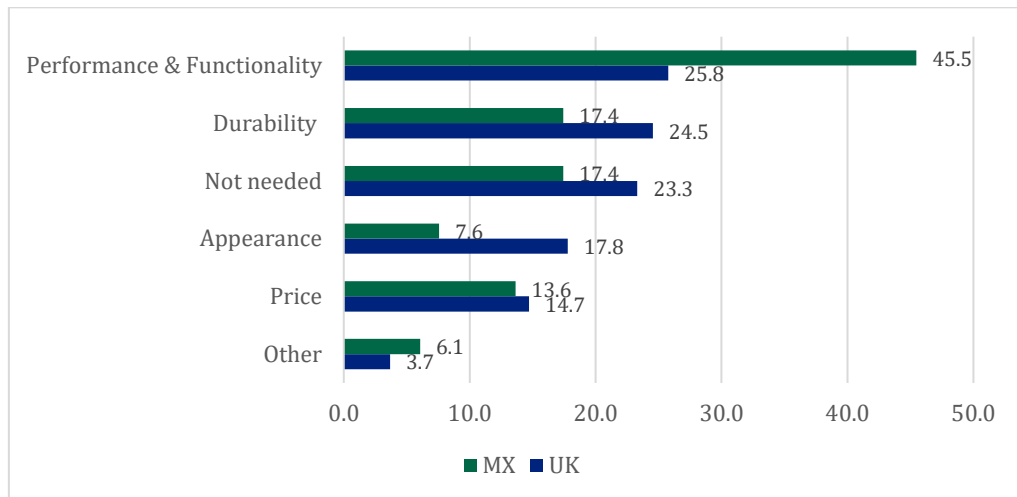
According to these results, the average of participants that declared to be always or often willing to pay premium for ethical products is larger in Mexico (31.2%) than in the United Kingdom (24.2%). From all these categories, technological devices is the category in which participants were more reluctant to pay premium when social or environmental benefits are offered.



**Figure 4.5.** Willingness to pay premium in clothing, furniture and technological devices.



The last item on this section explored the reasons for regretting the last unsuccessful purchase. Figure 4.6 breaks down the causes. In both groups the most frequent response was dissatisfaction because of poor performance and functionality (the item did not work as expected) followed by the durability of the product (it did not last as expected). Appearance was the less frequent answer in Mexico whilst in the United Kingdom was a high price.



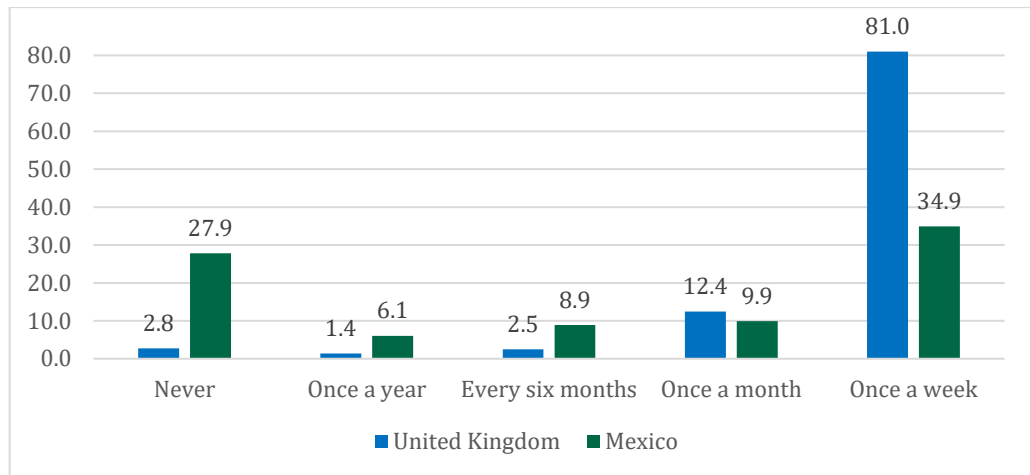
**Figure 4.6.** Reasons for dissatisfaction in the last unsuccessful purchase.

### **Pro-environmental activities linked to infrastructures**

Other surveys that measure the environmental impact of individuals take into account activities such as means of transportation and waste recycling patterns. These items seem to be those that have the largest differences between the countries and they are also those that are linked to infrastructures of countries. Experts have acknowledge the importance of these indicators as a way to capture progress on green growth in different countries (OECD, 2014a). However, exploring the reasons in these items is not the scope of the research, however, it is important to acknowledge them to avoid overlooking the relevance of infrastructures for performing pro-environmental behaviour.

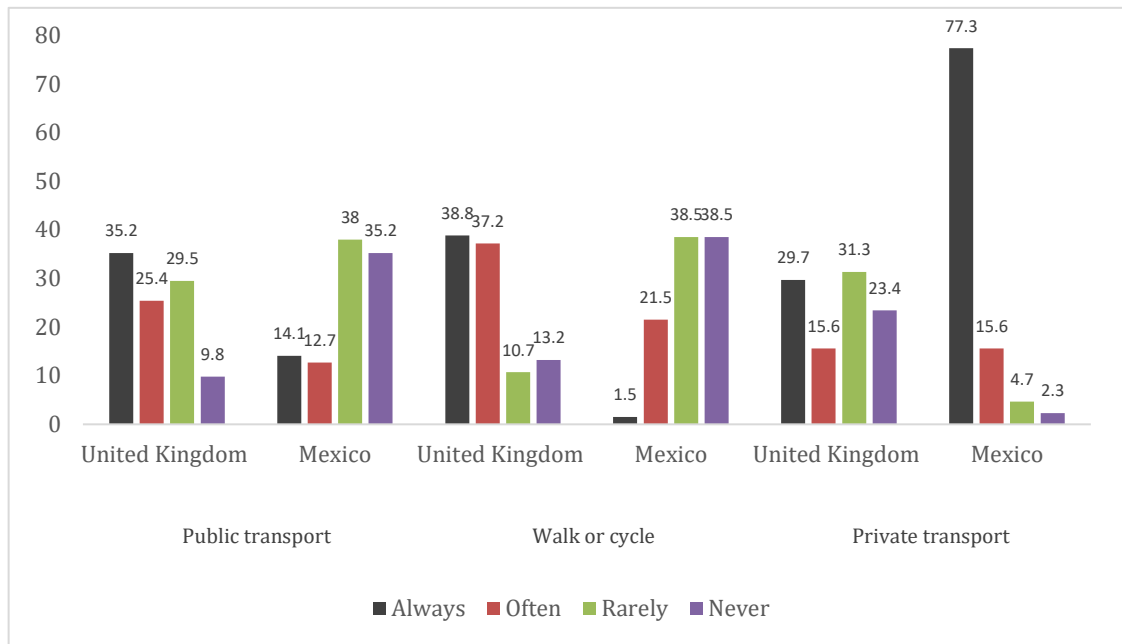
In terms of recycling activities in each country, section 2.5.2 showed that recycling rates are higher in the United Kingdom (43%) than in Mexico (5%). The result from the survey are consistent with this national statistic showing that in Mexico, recycling activities are significantly lower compared to the United Kingdom. As shown

in Figure 4.7 in which Mexico presented less frequency than the United Kingdom. In Mexico, participants who declared never to recycle their waste constitute 27.9% of the population whilst the same group represents only the 2.8% in the United Kingdom.



**Figure 4.7.** Average recycling frequency (including plastics, metals, paper and glass).

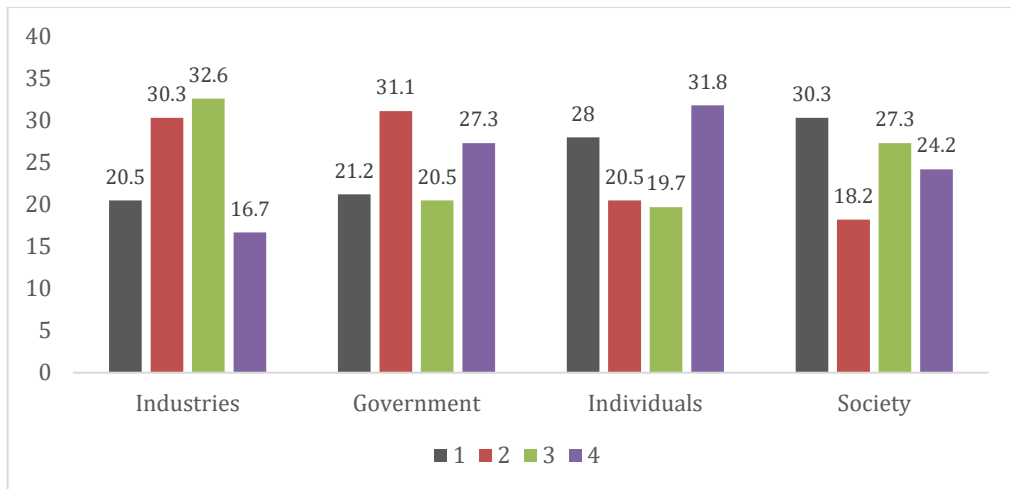
In the case of the transportation, differences were also significant between the two countries. In Mexico and United Kingdom, according to OECD data, private cars dominate the passenger transport mode (OECD, 2015a, p. 62). But, among survey participants, as Figure 4.8 shows, private transportation is more frequently used in Mexico than in the United Kingdom in which the largest percentage walk or cycle. In Mexico, 80% of participants declared to always use *private* transportation compared to a 29.7% in the United Kingdom. The less frequent option in Mexico was *walking or cycling* which reached only 1.5% of participants. Surprisingly, these results do not match with Department of transport data (2018, p. 4) which found that in the UK 83% of passenger kilometres in 2017 were made by private transportation.



**Figure 4.8.** Frequency of use by means of transportation.

These two sections in the survey (recycling activities and the transportation means) had the purpose of being included as part of the participants' individual scores to measure their attitudes and behaviours. However, when this difference was acknowledged, and considering that including them would cause a bias in the results, the decision made was to leave out the recycling activities and moderate the weight of the item regarding transportation to take weight out of these two items that are presumably far from individuals' scope of action.

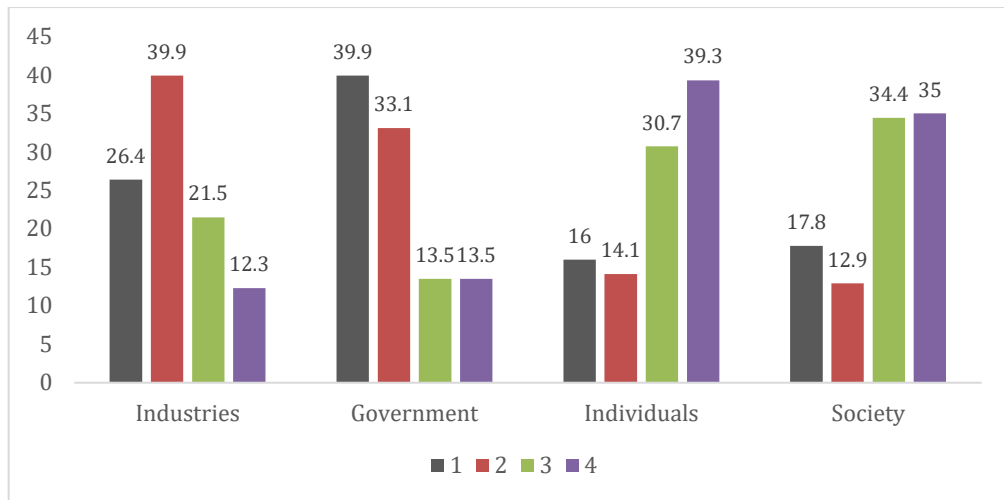
Finally, when it comes to promote sustainable actions, a relevant factor is the agents. Among agents that can lead are governments, politicians, industries or members of the society that encourage these changes. With the aim of knowing participants' opinion on this matter, they were asked to sort by relevance four agencies: government, industries, society and individuals, according to the possibility they have to solve environmental issues. Results of this question are presented in Figure 4.9 for Mexico and Figure 4.10 for the United Kingdom.



**Figure 4.9.** Ranking of agencies to solve environmental issues (Mexico).

In the case of Mexico (Figure 4.9) society was the agency most frequently chose as the most relevant agent for change, followed by individuals, then government and industries, correspondingly. In the case of the United Kingdom, the highest percentage for #1 was assigned to the government, followed by industries, society and individuals. Although further research on this topic would be needed, the results could indicate that in general, there is more perceived scope of action for people (as society and as individuals) in Mexico than in the United Kingdom (Figure 4.10) in which, the perceived margin power for implementing changes is bigger for institutions, including government and industries.

These results can lead to further exploration in subjects like individual perceived effectiveness, participants' perception of responsibilities, power, control, impact and other contextual mechanisms offered to citizens, as we will see in further phases. In other words, individuals' perception towards their own potential to change things, and how institutions play a role in "sustainable actions" varies considerably from one country to another. A preliminary analysis of this data could indicate that when it comes to the implementation of consumption and environmental policies, agencies that are leading them are also relevant for having a more effective impact.



**Figure 4.10.** Ranking of agencies to solve environmental issues (United Kingdom).

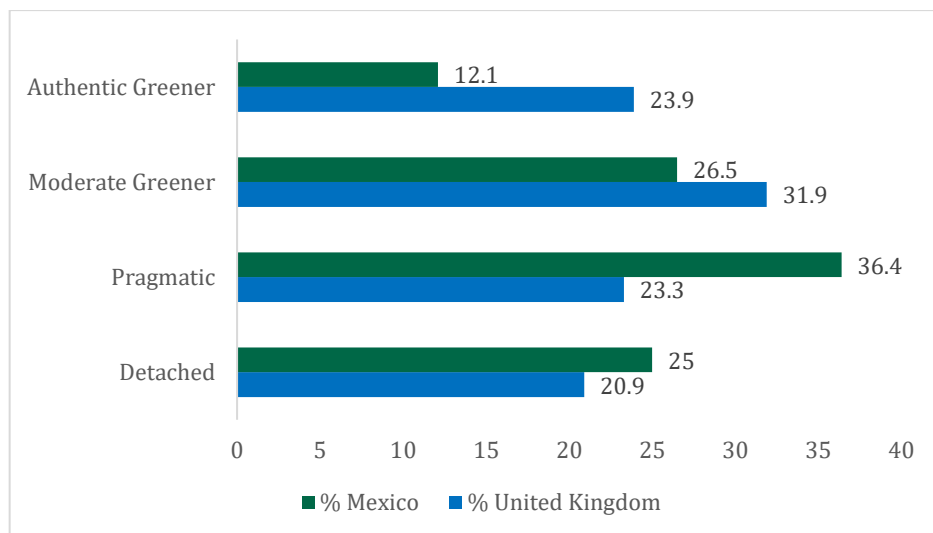
#### 4.1.4 Conclusions

Consumption and waste generation are frequently linked to development of nations. Mexico and the United Kingdom belong to different groups according to their income level. Hence, when working with participants from countries with different circumstances such as income levels, it is important to become “sensitive to structural conditions that contribute to participants responses and to the interpretations of situations informed by experiences, by validation of perceptions, and by a careful review of existing knowledge” (Liamputtong, 2010, p. 1256). Therefore, and this section becomes the background for findings for the qualitative data and is also a baseline for the discussion together with national statistics presented in Chapter 2. This data represents the general landscape of both countries.

This section presented an overall view of attitudes, behavioural intentions and actions of participants who took part of the survey as a way to show a wide view of both groups. Since national statistics might not reflect the reality of both groups of participants, it was required to present particular findings on topics that result relevant for reading the findings of this study. The elements of ethical consumption are complex and, as observed, really hard to capture through a survey.

## 4.2 Selection and classification of participants

Data from the survey provided the information for generating an individual score for each participant according to the responses. The scores were generated according to values assigned for items in the survey including attitudes, behavioural intentions and actions towards ethical consumption (Appendix B). The classification of participants by groups in relation to their individual scores also provided a baseline to analyse the divestment practices in the light of the ethical consumption with the aim of generating a broader perspective on the consumption spectrum. The percentage of participants in each profile is shown in Figure 4.11. The largest differences are situated in the *Authentic Greeners* group and the *Pragmatics* group in which, differences between countries are larger than a 10%.

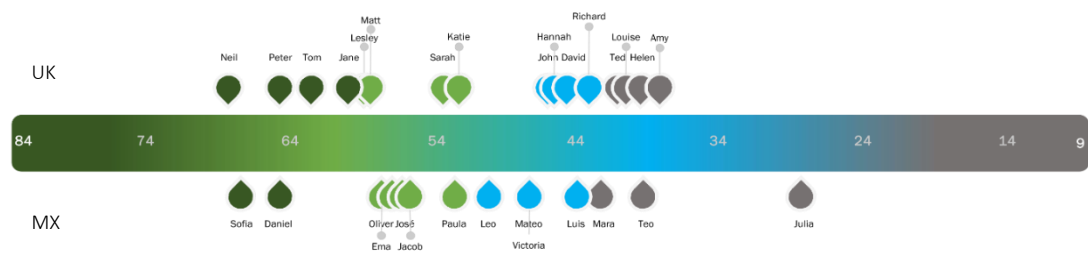


**Figure 4.11.** Percentage of profiles by country.

For the second stage of the research, the purposeful sampling was made through the evaluation of scores and selection of participants. The highest possible score in the survey was 84 points and the lowest was 9. Profiles were distributed in intervals in relation to the frequency. After grouping participants according to their scores, a total of 75 invitations were sent to take part of the interview, the second stage of the research, aiming to reach 32 interviewees, four per profile of each country.

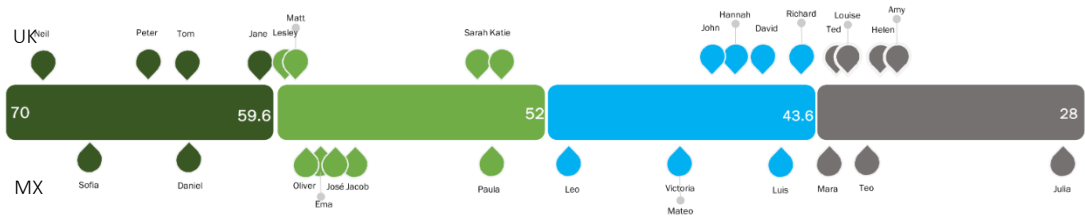
### 4.2.1 Interviewees and their scores

Survey results showed that, from the total of participants (295) none of them reached the highest (84), nor the lowest (9) score. Considering the fact that profiles were created as theoretical constructs to guide the data collection, this was not an unexpected result; since they are designed concepts that do not reflect exactly the reality. Figure 4.12 shows the distribution of participants according to the obtained scores in the survey considering the total range of possible values, with no solid boundaries between profiles, treating scores as gradients. In this figure, participants were distributed in absolute terms to present their place in relation to the absolute values of the survey. In other words, the ideal authentic greener would have got the highest score (84), whilst the detached one would have got the lowest (9). However, to provide an absolute reference of participants in the absolute scale, the place of each participant is shown in Figure 4.12. For each participant, a pseudonym was assigned to ensure anonymity.



**Figure 4.12.** Distribution of participants based on absolute values.

To select participants for the qualitative stage, a new distribution on obtained scores was carried out, taking the obtained values from participants' responses as reference: 72 as the highest and 28.3 as the minimum. Figure 4.13 also shows the distribution of participants according to their scores in the survey. The visual presents the interviewees in relation to real survey results. The final distribution was based on the minimum and the maximum scores on the survey, allowing to classify and group participants in relation to the sample results.



**Figure 4.13.** Distribution of participants based on relative internal values

A total of 30 participants were recruited in both countries (Table 4.1), 14 participants from Mexico and 16 participants from the United Kingdom. A satisfactory variety of profiles and scores were recruited for the interview stage. The strategy for recruitment was to send invitations in two rounds. The number of participants in each group varies according to the availability of survey respondents. The case of the authentic greener category was the one that presented these limitations. Due to the low percentage of potential participants in the case of Mexico, it was possible to recruit two people within this group instead of four.

**Table 4.2.** Participants scores and pseudonyms by profile.

Profile	Mexico		United Kingdom	
	Score	Pseudonym	Score	Pseudonym
Authentic Greener	68	Sofia	69	Neil
	63.3	Daniel	65	Peter
	*	*	63.3	Tom
	*	*	60.6	Jane
Moderate Greener	58.33	Oliver	59.5	Lesley
	58.00	Ema	59.3	Matt
	57.67	Jose	54	Sarah
	57.00	Jacob	53	Katie
	53.67	Paula	*	*
Pragmatic	51.67	Leo	47.00	John
	48.00	Mateo	46.67	Hannah
	48.00	Victoria	45.50	David
	44.33	Luis	44.00	Richard
Detached	43.00	Mara	42.33	Ted
	41.00	Teo	42.00	Louise
	29.00	Julia	40.00	Helen
	*	*	39.00	Amy



As mentioned in section 2.5, Mexico and the United Kingdom are different in terms of national statistics. However, this classification of participants, the creation of the general overview of both groups as a main background, contributed to generate a baseline for analysing divestment practices of each group and each participant, enabling the comparability between both cultural units and providing validity to the results.

According to data shown in this section, there is a good mix representing Mexico and the United Kingdom in sociodemographic variables as well as in attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable consumption. This allowed to select participants for the qualitative strand of the research considering a wide range of scores that represent differences for assuring diversity in participants for the qualitative stage of the research.

## **Chapter 5. Qualitative stage. Analysing how divestment practices are constituted**

The qualitative part of the research explored in-depth the process of divestment and its elements. It was designed with the aim of exploring divestment practice through its constituent elements: the intentions, the actions and the ends of the actors. In order to do so, experiences of participants were collected through photo-elicitation interview (Appendix C). The interviews were carried out face-to-face using the photographs of participants' belongings (Table 3.2), exploring in sequence the units of observation at different stages: a recently acquired item, a special item and one that was being discarded or recently divested. The sequential data collection was carried out with the aim of understanding the process of divestment through different moments of the consumption spectrum.

### **5.1 An introduction to the qualitative strand of the study**

A selection of participants from the quantitative strand were invited to take part in the qualitative stage of the research. From the 75 pre-selected participants, 30 agreed to be interviewed. This data collection took place between October 2017 and April 2018. Ethical standard procedures were fulfilled to protect participants' identity. The invitation was sent via email together with the project's information sheet (Appendix E). During each interview, the consent form (Appendix F) was provided to participants to communicate the way in which the information would be used, and the strategies followed by the researcher to protect their anonymity. Interviews were recorded and analysed subsequently. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes for which pictures were sent previously to the researcher via email, printed and used during the interview to go through each unit of observation: clothes, furniture and mobile phones.

Qualitative data was collected for items that participants selected as ready to be discarded and also in earlier stages of the lifespans of possessions to explore which factors of the objects' life history shape the divestment practice. This required a joined analysis of the use and appropriation stages as well as the virtual divestment practice.

## 5.2 The practice of divestment

Within the consumption spectrum, divestment represents the counterpart of appropriation, which is the process through which an item becomes owned by someone. During this process, a physical or/and an emotional attachment occur. Hence, whilst in the appropriation process the emotional and physical proximity with objects occurs, the divestment stage represents a process of separation and/or detachment. Divestment takes account of this separation and detachment which is more than the act of discarding things, as it refers to the process in which an agent stops perceiving the object as their own. Therefore, divestment comprises those activities that aim either to physical, mental and or emotional separation from material possessions. It is defined as the process that possessions go through while the appropriation fades. Hence, it comprises all the events that separate the owners from their possessions either physically, mentally or emotionally.

Qualitative data have unveiled the complexity of divestment and the intertwined links that it has with practices in contemporary lifestyles and with other moments in consumption such as acquisition and replacement activities. For this reason, stages before the material deterioration of products were investigated, in order to find out the elements in the use-divestment path that are shaping divestment outcomes. As a result of this analysis, it can be argued that divestment is formed by different dimensions. The study starts to untangle these dimensions by analysing three main areas:

- What are the ways in which divestment occurs?
- How are these ways of divestment enacted?
- When the divestment moments occur?

These elements contributed to expose the architecture of divestment practices through its main elements: the intentions, the actions and the ends of the actors. Hence, the first section of this chapter addresses the ways in which divestment occurs to move forward to the interpretation of these practices. The qualitative analysis helped to identify the common channels for divestment on each unit of observation in order to understand the normative situation for each of the cultural units.

A variety of channels for carrying out divestment in both cultural units were identified. It is observed that the frequency and type vary from one country to another, and from one type of product to another. Divestment was previously described in terms of the place that it occupies in the consumption spectrum, relating it to the appropriation and the detachment process. Hence, before describing in detail the ways in which

participants divest their items in each country, a distinction between different types of divestment will be presented, with the aim of addressing the general elements identified in the process of divestment. It has been acknowledged that divestment implies a separation from owners and possessions. This separation can occur in two main ways:

- When there is a physical or spatial separation between owner and possessions.
- When the item has fallen into disuse, but there is not spatial separation between the owner and the item. It is still possessed by her/him.

These two ways of divestment are culturally independent which means they were practiced in both countries regardless of the differences between the two cultural units.

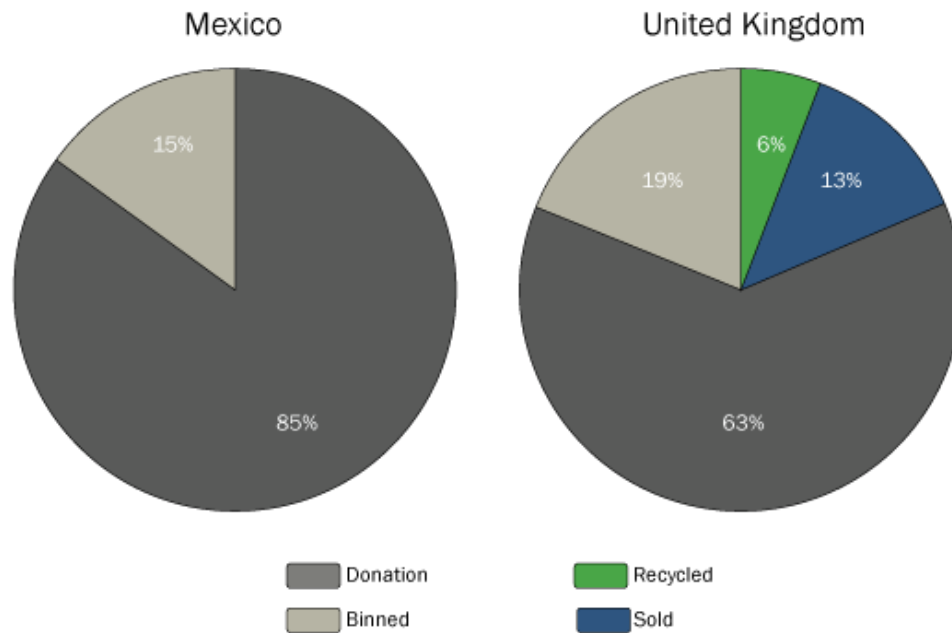
### **5.2.1 What are the ways in which divestment occurs? Channels for divestment**

One of the specific research objectives is to identify the ways in which divestment occurs. The interviews explored the channels for divesting material possessions. For both cultural units, these channels were grouped into five different types: binning, recycling, selling, donating and keeping. This last category has been considered as part of the divestment channels since it involves a process of detachment meaning that the item is still owned but no longer used. These channels for divestment have different implications in relation to sustainable consumption principles. Hence, two classes were identified among them:

- Low impact: those that enable the recirculation of products or materials. These include recycling, selling and donating.
- High impact: those that annihilate the value of products and materials or restrict the possibility of recirculation: keeping and binning.

Although this classification provides the first outline for evaluating the possibilities of intervention in practices of divestment, qualitative data show that it constitutes only the first layer of the complex process of divestment. Low impact and high impact channels for divestment may have different environmental or social impact. These variations are linked to the type of product and the context. The impact of these factors will be explored in detail after the description of the general landscape of divestment channels for each cultural unit.

Channels for divestment of the three different units of observation are presented as follows: clothing (Figure 5.1), furniture (Figure 5.2) and mobile phones (Figure 5.3). The figures display the percentage of participants that chose the different channels to divest their things. In this section, the category of donations comprises the following types of donations: donation to charitable institutions, donations to friends and family members, donations to employees<sup>9</sup> and unspecified donations.



**Figure 5.1.** Participants' selected channels for divesting clothing.

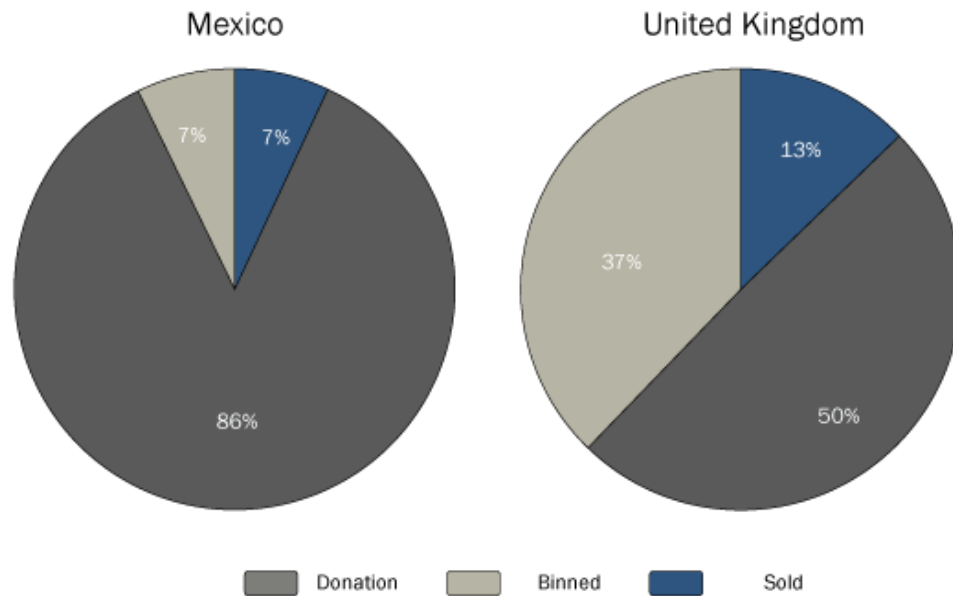
In the case of clothing, there are four ways of divestment: donation, binning, recycling and selling. In Mexico, only donating and binning appeared as options. For the United Kingdom, a few participants declared to have the intention to sell or recycle their items. Interestingly, the recycling channel was not mentioned by participants in Mexico, which resonates with the results obtained from the quantitative strand of the research, confirming that recycling is an alternative that is not sufficiently spread or promoted in the Mexican context.

For the category of furniture (Figure 5.2) the channels in both countries were donations, as the most frequent one; followed by binning, and finally, selling activities.

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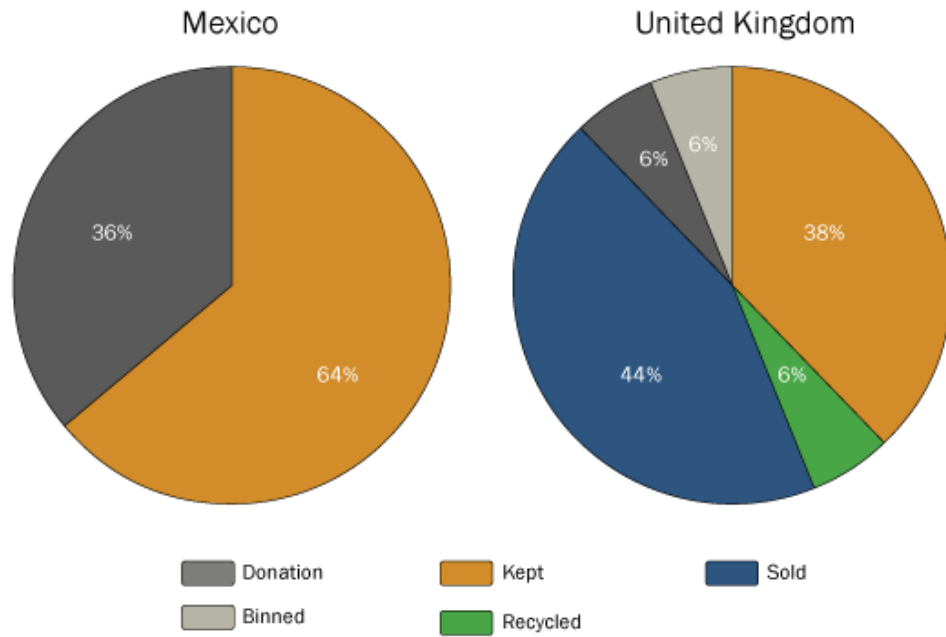
<sup>9</sup> This category refers to people that donate their things to domestic workers or, in the case of business owners, any person that works for their companies. Details are explained in section 5.5.7.

In this category, the percentage of binned items is larger in the United Kingdom than in Mexico. The percentage of sold items is almost twice in the United Kingdom than in Mexico.



**Figure 5.2.** Participants' selected channels for divesting furniture.

The category of mobile phones, among the three units of analysis is the one that shows more variety of channels chosen by participants (Figure 5.3). Remarkably, for both countries keeping is a channel chosen by a significant proportion of the total of interviewees; 64% of participants in Mexico and 38% in the United Kingdom declared to store the phones that are no longer in use. In most of the cases, this applies not only for the most recently divested mobile phone owned by participants, but also for the previous devices. Another interesting finding is that, in the United Kingdom selling and recycling mobile phones is a relatively popular practice, whilst in Mexico they tend to be kept or donated.



**Figure 5.3.** Participants' selected channels for divesting mobile phones.

These results illustrate the landscape of divestment channels in both countries for each unit of observation. So far, the donations category comprises various types of divestment, aiming to capture an overall picture of the possibility for materials and products to be recirculated. The following section will breakdown the information of divestment channels describing the different implications of the types of donations which are interrelated with contextual factors.

### 5.2.2 Divestment channels and consumer profiles

After categorising the different channels used for the divestment of clothing, furniture and mobile phones by country, an analysis was carried out to find out if there was any pattern or relation between the consumer profiles (described in section 3.2) and the selected channels for divestment. In order to do so, the four groups of participants were analysed in conjunction. Figure 5.4 presents the selected channels by participants in the three categories of product. In this visual, the channels for donations are presented individually (discussed in detail in section 5.5). Hence, the included channels for divestment are: binning, recycling, keeping, selling, giving to family or friends, donating to charity, giving to employees and unspecified giving away.

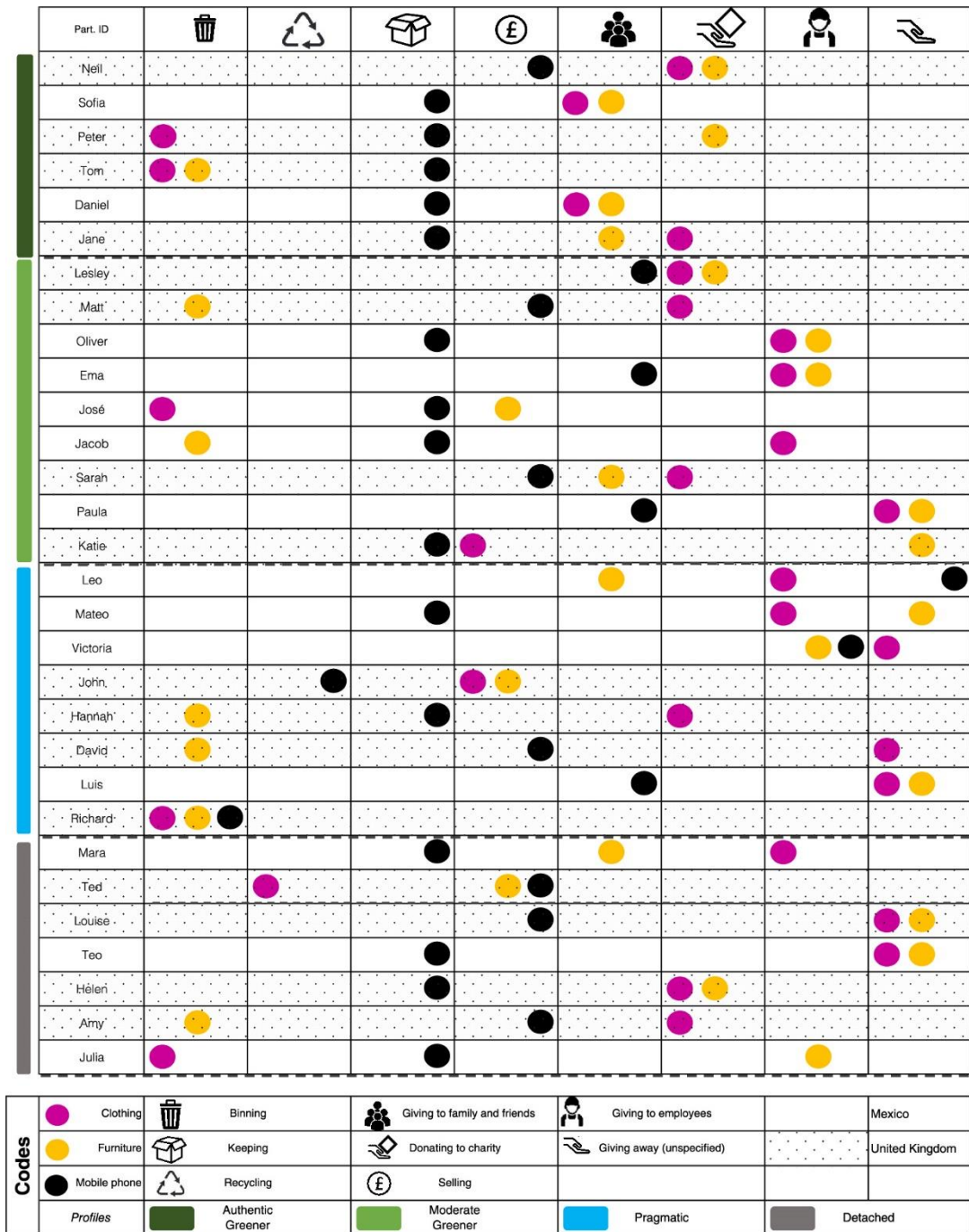


Figure 5.4. Divestment channels by participant and type of product.

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of this analysis is that consumer profiles do not fully correspond with divestment activities. Participants classified as authentic or moderate greeners did not show a resolute interest in keeping their belongings or searching for a sustainable channel for their divestment. The opposite case was also found: participants with low scores for ethical purchasing expressed the extra effort they make to dispose of something in an environmental or socially responsible way. Although these details will be further explored in the following sections, at a first glance,



findings summarised in Figure 5.4 show that participants, regardless of their consumer profile, manifest a balanced interest in the low impact channels for divestment.

Another relevant finding from this analysis is that it is more common to find patterns in the chosen channels for divestment among the cultural units than among consumer profiles. This confirms one of the notions of cross-cultural studies, which discuss the homogeneity of countries as cultural units<sup>10</sup> sharing specific codes and practices despite the differences in personal values. Additionally, there are more similarities in the chosen channels for divestment when grouping by item than by consumer profile. The mobile phones category seems to be the clearest case, with a large proportion of participants keeping their old phones, regardless of their consumer profile or nationality.

Even though most of the chosen divestment channels are in the recirculation categories, the United Kingdom and Mexico present significant differences. Donations to charities is a widespread practice in the United Kingdom, especially for clothing donation. In Mexico, the most common type of donation occurs from participants to their employees. Another relevant difference is the case of binning, which is more frequently declared as the chosen conduit in the United Kingdom than in Mexico. Recycling activities only appear in the United Kingdom, as well as selling activities, with the exception of one participant in Mexico.

The fact that there is no consistency among consumer profiles and divestment channels reveals the complexity of the divestment process. According to these results it can be argued that factors involved in the practice of divestment are not significantly correlated with factors in the acquisition stages and that the practice involves other factors outside the control of individuals. The data presented in Figure 5.4 confirm what was theorised in the conceptual framework (Section 2.4.3): practices are closely linked to lifestyles and contextual factors.

These findings suggest that individually, people do not show a consistent preference for one channel or another. It can thus be suggested that choosing a channel for divestment is not strongly related to an individual set of values. Practice theory elucidates how each practice can transform even within the same person in relation to social dynamics “dispositions and habits can be both picked up through and actualised by actions in different practices in diverse social domains with their particular material

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<sup>10</sup> Minkov (2013) explored the homogeneity of practices among members of a culture, as a way to validate countries as cultural units. Some studies have found, for example, that people from different religious denominations that live in the same society still have similar values, norms, attitudes and beliefs (Minkov, 2013, p. 30).

arrangements and infrastructures” (Hui et al., 2017, p. 18). Each product, therefore, has different social and contextual arrangements, and the practitioners will negotiate with these elements when deciding the convenient channels for the physical divestment of an item.

The presented data also corroborate the idea that when observed under the lens of divestment, lifespan seems to be more a multi-layered theoretical concept that is intrinsically intertwined with users’ daily life experiences. Hence, understanding human practices towards possessions is of great importance for sustainable consumption. In-depth discussion of these factors will be explored in the following sections by arguing that divestment is a process built upon lifestyles and other practices.

### **5.3 The divestment process. Towards a taxonomy of divestment**

The most conventional perspective for studying products lifespans is to analyse the process as linear. There is a certain tendency to think that a product has only a point when "it is born" and another point when it becomes waste. This is arguably why most of the current solutions have focused on designing and manufacturing longer lasting products. As an example, the concept of obsolescence can explain this idea of how an object reach an end of life. With planned obsolescence this death point has been predetermined by an external agent that is creating an expiration date for the objects. Even though this is true for some products, particularly those whose electric components have been programmed for stop working (Hellmann and Luedicke, 2018, p. 84), and under specific circumstances, it is not a rule for many of the durable goods that we acquire and divest frequently. The events between purchase and disposal are significant for solving problems of overconsumption and waste generation.

Findings of this study revealed the complexity of divestment under the practice theory perspective. Hence, the complexity of divestment can be better understood if analysed as a multi-layered process formed by different dimensions. The dimensions are the fields in which divestment practices are carried out. They go from spaces – either social or physical, to sociohistorical conditions and situational factors. These layers constitute the architectures of divestment practice configuring the how, when and why divestment occurs. It is in these dimensions that the complexity of divestment resides. The first layer of the divestment practice (divestment channels) has been described in the previous section; in order to disentangle the complexity of divestment the next sections

aim to explore how possessions reach this point. This allows to unveil the complexity of divestment and the intertwined links with earlier stages of products. Decisions on divestment are interconnected to acquisition and replacement activities.

### **5.3.1 Why a taxonomy?**

The reasons for divestment cannot be reduced to specific features in any given item. Instead, it can be understood as a process full of intricacies that encompasses the interactions of humans, objects and lifestyles. Arguably, the concept *divestment* acknowledges the agency of humans, the context, the material possessions and the interactions between them. This section shows how factors that assure products with a longer lifespan (including quality and performance) are not fixed. Other situational and contextual influences tend to be more impactful in divestment practices.

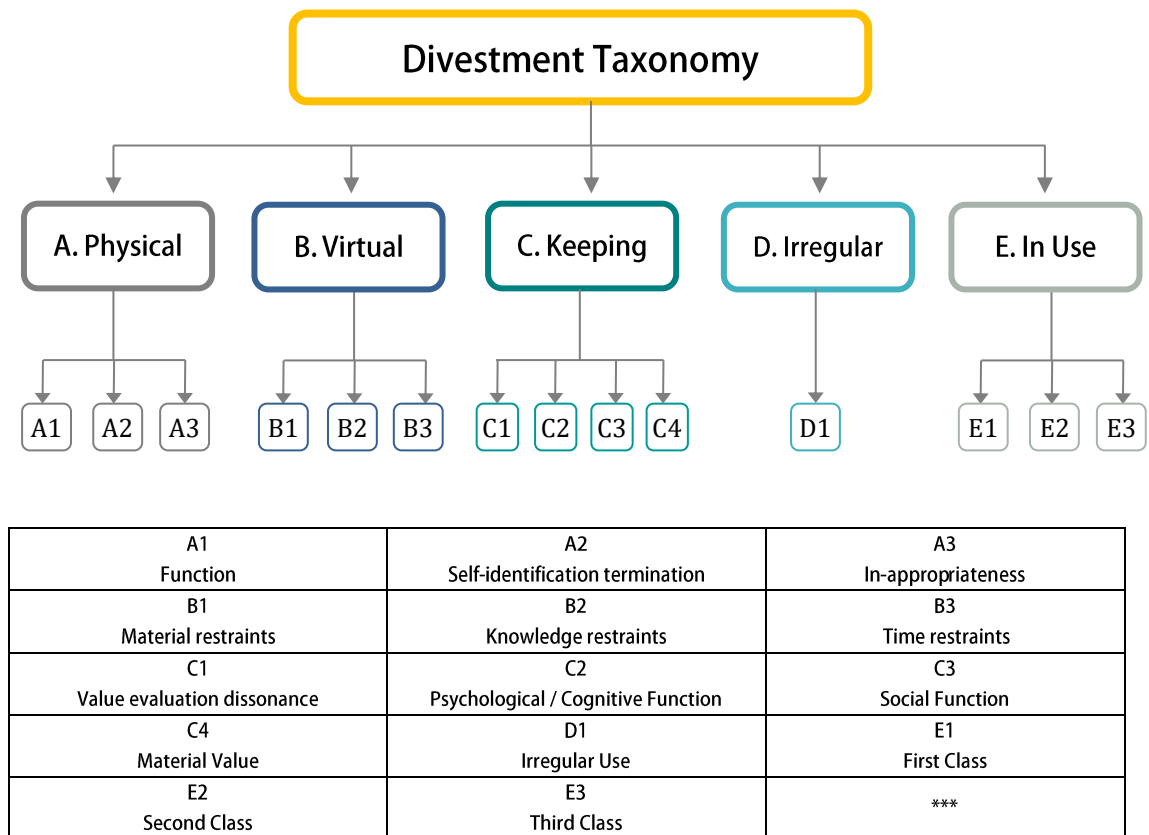
This study aims to intersect different stages in the consumption spectrum on the grounds that divestment is a process resulting from the coexistence and conciliation of two concepts: value and waste. It is for this reason that a taxonomy for divestment is proposed. A taxonomy is a particular system of classifying things. Hence, divestment taxonomy classifies the value-waste negotiations that occur during the lifespan of a product. The present taxonomy is composed of five main categories with each one of them including different subcategories.

Understanding divestment aims of contributing to sustainable consumption practices. For this reason, *using and keeping* stages of products were analysed to build the taxonomy, in order to capture how the process of divestment intersects with other practices. Although these phases may appear to be outside the divestment domain, the taxonomy aims to demonstrate that these allegedly *non-divestment* stages are part of the process and they can hold a divestment seed. Findings from the taxonomy contribute with insights for a sustainable consumption paradigm based on this process of value-waste negotiations.

One of the research aims was to understand the elements that constitute divestment process and how it is connected to other stages of the consumption spectrum. Hence, in order to explain these elements sequentially, data was analysed considering three stages of a product lifespan: use (recently acquired items) cherished items and those that were ready to be “discarded”. Data from interviews suggests that a few of these divestment elements can be found in the initial stages of products' lifespan showing that divestment is a dynamic, non-linear, non-sequential process and it does

not follow an established pattern, so there are no straightforward decisions when it comes to divesting material possessions.

This complexity occurs because there are activities that are part of social life that can interfere with former decisions, accelerating or slowing the divestment process. In some of these cases, the user is more a passive agent than an active one (referring to eventualities that the possessions go through). As a conclusion, events that strongly impact the divestment decision making can be shaped in the early stages of products.



**Figure 5.5.** Categories in Divestment Taxonomy.

The five main taxonomy categories provide insight for sustainable consumption goals in different ways, which might be challenging to understand if the acquisition, the use and the divestment practices are analysed separately. Hence, the present taxonomy also promotes the analysis of the consumption through an integrative perspective. The five main categories, built upon the analysis of the interviews, can be described as follows:

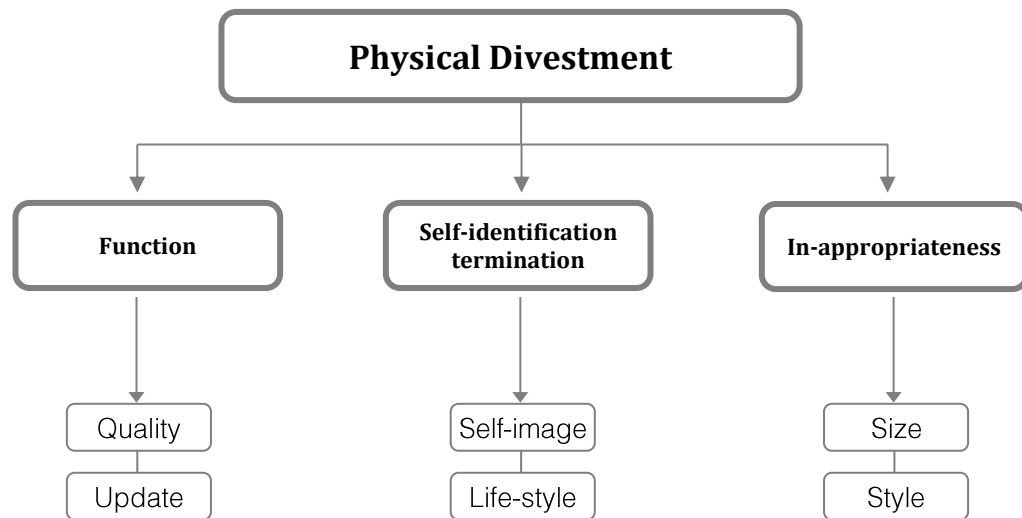
- **Physical divestment.** It deals with the question of how people decide to divest their possessions and it includes all the activities that imply the physical separation of the owner and the possession. It provides information about the reasons for choosing specific channels as well as the factors behind the choice.
- **Virtual divestment.** In the sustainable consumption field, one of the strategies to counteract the effects of consumerism is to upcycle products and materials. Virtual divestment is, in other words, an accumulation of energy and materials that have no use. If more knowledge about this stage is gained, we can facilitate the process for the reintegration of these possessions either to commercialisation channels or materials reprocessing chains.
- **Keeping / not used.** Similar to the previous category in practical terms, but different in terms of user's levels of engagement and appropriation of goods, this category comprises those possessions that are not used (they do not have any practical function), and it could be formally considered as virtual divestment. Nonetheless, users have strong motivations for keeping the items as they do have a cognitive or emotional function.
- **Irregular use.** All the items that are classified as useless and people categorise them as not wanted. However, they have periods in which they are used and others in which they are stored. It is a transitional stage of possessions.
- **In use:** This category includes the first stage of products after acquisition. If divestment is analysed as a process, the *in use* phase is the beginning of it. Possessions start to lose value and some of them start their divestment process.

### 5.3.2 Describing the classes in the taxonomy

#### A) Physical divestment

As it was already stated, divestment comprises all these activities that aim at a separation of users from material possessions. The first type of divestment is the effective divestment, which refers to the physical separation between the possessions and the owner. This is the most tangible type of divestment since it implies a physical separation and it holds no conflict between the decision-action dichotomies. For that reason, most of the studies in the field of divestment and obsolescence have focused on this type. In *physical divestment* the intention of divesting something and the action

required for doing so come together. This type of divestment (Figure 5.6) has been split in three different sub-categories, concerning motivations to divest that were found in participants experiences when divesting goods.



**Figure 5.6.** Physical divestment categorisation.

These sub-categories are:

- **Function**

This subcategory refers to cases in which the main reason for divesting an object is directly linked to its performance. There is a significant failure that prevents the object from working efficiently. The lack of efficacy when doing a task, as well as the loss of quality in the item, are the more common practical reasons for divesting goods in the realm of the functional.

A more detailed classification of this category includes two groups:

- *Quality*: When objects lose features that were a sign of good quality or “newness” in terms of appearance. The object suffers the changes.
- *Update*: There is no transformation within the object, but it is the context that gives meaning to the reason for divestment. Phones are an example of this: the item can be functional, but changes in the perceived norm of specifications demand an upgrade and imply that the existing product is now substandard.

- **Self-identification termination**

Previous studies (Appadurai, 1988; Douglas and Isherwood, 2002; Miller, 2005) have explained how objects are not only functional in terms of performing a task (i.e. phones for communication, clothing for protection from weather conditions, a chair for sitting). Another purpose of possession is the construction of the self through material things. The things that we own and use are an expression of our personalities and the uniqueness want to show. When we select and use an item, it conveys a message without using verbal language: we rely on the item to say something about ourselves. Since material possessions are a way to express our personality, once we feel the object does no longer correspond to our self-image or our circumstances, it can be the beginning of a process of divestment. An objective of the study described in this thesis was to find links among replacement and divestment activities and one of the most evident connections can be found in this sub-category. As reason for deciding to get rid of a shirt, the participant Lesley mentioned that “someone younger than her needed to wear it” (Moderate Greener, United Kingdom).

For this sub-category, there are two sources for self-identification termination that lead to physical divestment:

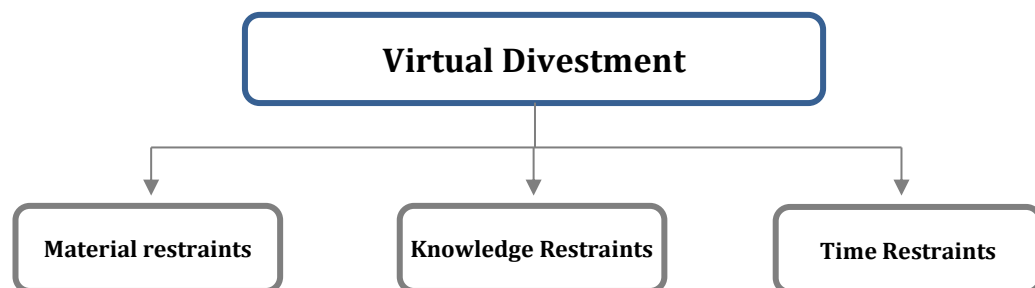
- *Modified self-image.* When the consumer goes through an evaluation and reflection of the self, and there is a change in their self-image. As material possessions provide an express of ourselves, divesting of existing possessions and investing in new possessions facilitate the change in self-expression
- *Lifestyle change.* Circumstances and social practices can have different codes for which an item can be appropriate or not. When a person modifies her/his immediate environment, the suitability of goods is evaluated. Participants declared that when they get a new job, or they change their marital status or even when they reach a specific age, they will have to reconsider using material possessions that can go with the new lifestyle. This also refers to spaces (for the case of furniture). It helps with the process of interiorising a reality.

- **In-appropriateness**

The dictionary defines *appropriateness* as “the quality of being suitable or proper in the circumstances”. Hence, this category encloses items that are no longer suitable for a specific set of conditions that has changed. Particularly, the appropriateness of an item is evaluated against two primary sources of change: individual (e.g. body size) and collective (e.g. style in fashion). In this case, the divestment practice starts not with the owner self-perception, but with a message from the outside (i.e. it is not the right size, it is not fashionable).

## **B) Virtual divestment**

Virtual divestment (Figure 5.7) includes all items that users classified as unwanted, but that they still own. As opposed to physical divestment, in which there is a spatial separation between the owner and the possession, this type of divestment is not manifested through physical separation, but a mind-set that leaves the item out of the regular use category. In other words, the divestment has started but no further action towards a physical divestment has been executed, except for placing the items outside of their regular place inside homes. The participants can articulate that there is a need for action in order to finish the divestment process, but for some reason that final act of physical separation has not occurred. The subgroups in this category are related to the nature of the obstacles and barriers to physically divesting the item.



**Figure 5.7.** Virtual divestment categorisation.

This category includes three sub-categories that group the reasons why the items have not been effectively divested. This category differentiates from the *Keeping / no use* category. It is worth to mention here, to differentiate this category from the following category since in the virtual divestment no sign of attachment was found. Virtual



divestment focuses on items that are a step away from being effectively divested. Interviews with participants have indicated that divestment was influenced by the effort needed to execute the decision. According to personal and contextual circumstances, the divestment decision can be confronted with restraints of different nature, which are comprised in the following sub-categories of the virtual divestment:

- **Material restraints**

When the person has already identified a specific way to get rid of the item, but cannot find a suitable place or channel, the item will be kept until this condition is fulfilled. Material restraints are strongly linked to contextual factors (e.g. particularities of the place in which the person lives), which means that they are less connected to personal circumstances.

- **Knowledge restraints**

As part of the divestment process, the amount of information is a significant component for moving from the thought of divesting an item to actually divesting it. There must be a specific amount of information in order to execute the divestment and, if the user does not have the knowledge to deal with the unwanted item, she/he will keep it until the information is gathered and enables the possibility of processing it. The amount of information that is required for divesting an item is dependent on the expectations of the owner. As an example, participants who showed concern about environmental issues will keep the items until an option that provides the safe and responsible divestment appears on their landscape.

- **Time restraints**

In some occasions, the owner has enough information on how to divest something. However, the time required to do so prevents the item from being effectively divested. Like the previous category, time is relative in terms of how much availability the person has. This will be again, balanced with personal requirements.

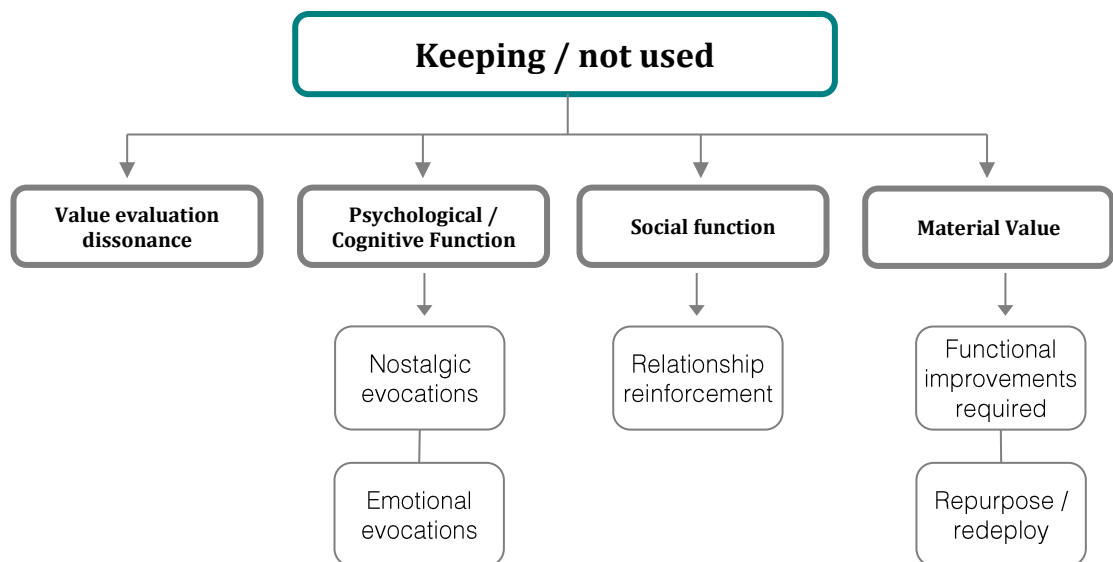
### **C) Keeping / not used**

Kept items are included as a category in the taxonomy of divestment, for the reason that participants labelled some possessions as if they were going to get rid of them. However, there were not materials, knowledge or time constraints for them to do so. Even when

they could articulate that the plan was to get rid of these items, participants were unable to articulate why they were still holding on to them, even when they recognised that there was a good potential to recirculate them.

Hence, even though these possessions were in appearance ready to be discarded, the owners were still considering them as their possession. The difference between this category and the virtual divestment is that, in the *Keeping / not used* category participants did not declare that they were waiting for an ideal situation, which was the case of virtual divestment, for discarding the item. There is a clear loss in the value of the item compared to when it was new; however, it is still somehow valued by the owner.

This category is based on the fact that, when some items are acquired, the owner starts to establish a relationship with them that might determine their destiny. Some items helped to consolidate memories or relationships, they are symbolic in this sense. Even when they can lose some of their value, they remain in the brain as a manifestation of these connections with other moments and practices in the life experiences and they are used to make sense of real-life situations. This category can be classified into four groups: value evaluation dissonance, psychological and cognitive function, social function and material value (Figure 5.8).



**Figure 5.8.** Keeping / Not used categorisation.

- **Value evaluation dissonance**

This sub-category puts in evidence a conflict in the valuation of the item in respect to what it represents to effectively divest the item by any channel. It has more value than any item categorised for donations; however it has less value than any usable item. This a frequent case for mobile phones. The argument here is that the attachment that is established with this type of possessions does not reach an emotional level to be kept as part of the special items. The value in this case is directly associated to the price that owners paid for the item and is completely detached from the real value of the materials stored on them. The concept of “value evaluation dissonance” is based on the principles of a cognitive dissonance (i.e. the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to attitude change). Participants did not articulate this dissonance, it is a theoretical concept that emerged from the way they expressed about their items:

*“...In fact, I have been keeping this jacket for more than a year. I haven’t worn it in more than two years... that is why I am hesitating. It is there, thinking that I could use it at some point. I have not found a reason to throw it away...”* (Jacob, Moderate Greener, Mexico,)

*“...I don’t feel any attachment to my old mobile phones, and I know that these are things that you cannot put in the bin. I still have it because, in part I have been lazy to do any research and find a place to take my phone; on the other hand, if I do so, I feel like I am throwing money away... I know that there are some places in which they would take the phone but no, I know that it has some value...”* (Mara, Detached, Mexico)

- **Psychological and cognitive function**

Possessions in this subcategory have a purpose in the personal sphere. This gives the item a value, mostly of association with moments or experiences in the participants’ lives. This category includes two types of psychological and cognitive functions:

- **Emotional evocations.** The object represents a moment and becomes a material representation of that moment or experience. An example of an emotional evocation is presented through a participant’s experience:

*“...I was in Mexico City outside walking and it was raining. I saw this waistcoat in a shop and I liked it. I entered in the shop, I wrung out my shirt and put the waistcoat on. I felt like I was hugging my mom. I remember that moment and I feel that the piece of clothing was added to my body. Since that moment I fell in love with that garment... After that I bought new ones so this one has to go because I have had it for enough time...”* (Teo, Detached, Mexico)

- **Nostalgic evocations.** Although this category also includes an emotional component, the stronger feeling is a nostalgia feeling, which is differentiated from the last category because the object is a reminder, a resource to fix a particular situation in someone's memory. This category was mainly found in clothing, but some cases were also found in furniture. The case of Ted, describing why he still keep a non-wearable pair of jeans is a case of a nostalgic evocation:

*"I like this brand, it represents the rockers and my favourite music groups, they use it... I cannot wear them anymore, but I did not want to get rid of it, it was my wife's decision. I do like them, the way they look, they're comfortable... That happened a month ago, but I didn't get rid of them. I'm hiding them. It's hard to get rid of them... They're special for me..."* (Ted, United Kingdom, detached)

- **Social function**

Items have a function within the social circles. They might be given to the owner as a present from family or friends. The item, even when is not used, is kept because it symbolises the relationship. It has a social connection function because of its symbolic value and it helps to strengthen links between families and/or friends:

*"This jacket was a gift from my girlfriend. I have had it for four years and in the beginning, I was wearing it for her, but not anymore... I never liked it and it has to go because I don't like it. It should not be in my closet, I think I will get rid of it now..."* (Luis, Mexico, Pragmatic)

- **Material value**

The owner considers that the item is still usable, therefore some improvements might be executed in order to reintegrate it to a normal use. The item was classified as not usable as a whole, but some participants kept it because they considered that some parts and/or after fixing, could be still having a functionality. Most of the times, participants expressed the potential functionality very imprecisely, meaning that no short-term plan has been designed for repairing or reusing the item or its parts.

## **D) Irregular use**

A stage in which possessions have lost some value and the divestment process has started, but the owner is still in the process of making a choice while occasionally using the product. In this category the item could be pre-selected for a physical divestment. However, actions have not been done towards this. The main difference with the virtual divestment is that, in the *Irregular use* class the owner still occasionally uses the item and reflects constantly about practicing a physical divestment.

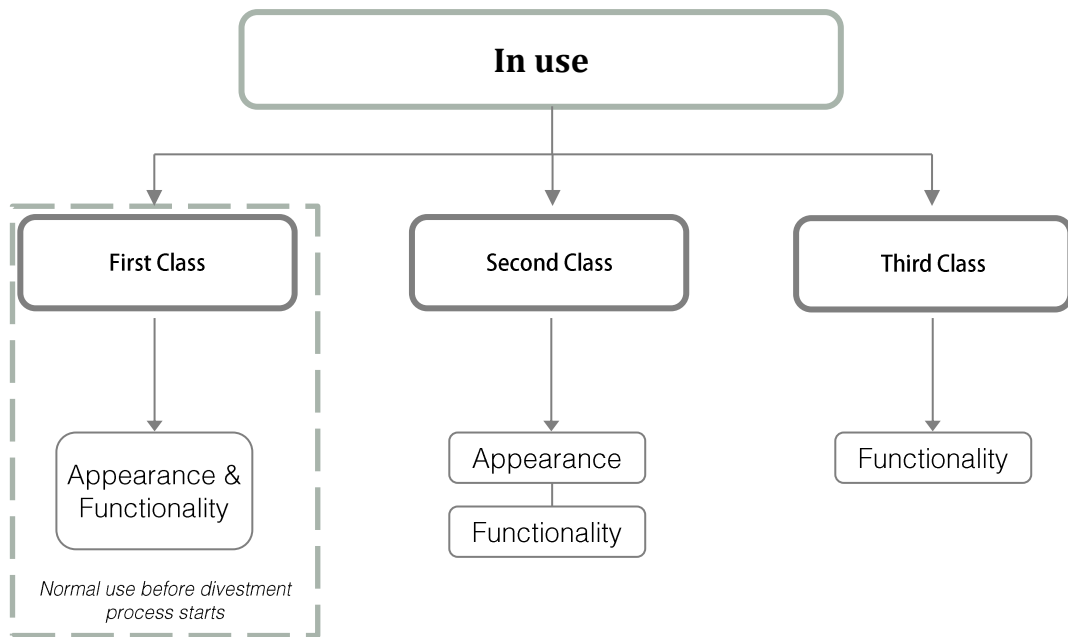
From the interviews it can be noticed that items can stay in this category for long periods of time. Several cases were found in which participants described to have items in the *Irregular use* category. The case of Mara is an example in the clothing category. She declared to have an item that she was ready to get rid of it; however, by exploring her case deeply she mentioned:

*I decided that I did not want it anymore three or four years ago, but last year I wore it a couple of times... I can wear it with many outfits... This is why is hard to get rid of it, it is a life saver, that is why I keep it but, if I don't force myself to get rid of it, the new item will never enter in my life, because the back-up is always there (Mara, Mexico, Detached).*

The *Irregular use* category can be a point for preventing divestment because the value of the item is still being constructed. Some other participants mentioned that through reflection they decided to take their items back to the regular or normal use category. Sometimes this action prevents items from divestment, in other occasions it leads to their virtual divestment. This category is not further split, since there are not categorical differentiations. However, different nuances can be found such as the frequency of use and the length of time the item is still possessed by the owner before moving to another divestment category.

## **E) In use**

During the *In use* phase (Figure 5.9) the owners start to negotiate the value of their possessions. Throughout this stage, value is expressed in two ways: based on the item's function and on its appearance, linked to the aesthetic and to its identity elements. The categorisation uses the "normal use" as a reference point. This is the sub-category in which the divestment process has not started yet. Then, when it starts losing some of its value, it moves to a different sub-category.



**Figure 5.9.** In use categories.

It is worth mentioning that the sub-categories in the *In use* category are more evident for the clothing items. Additionally, some items never go through a “normal use” phase and this is often linked to the way the item was acquired. An example is the case of items that people received as a present:

*I decided to get rid of them probably the same day that I've got them... I didn't like them, and they were a gift, I know they were expensive so I rather give them to someone that will actually use them. It was my parent's gift... they often buy me clothes and the most cases they're okay, they're not usually what I choose but I always gratefully see them because I don't want to hurt their feelings, and so I did grateful: "oh yes, thank you, they're brilliant" but normally they give me t-shirts or jumpers but these, I don't like them. (Matt, UK, Moderate greener).*

The experience of Matt proves that some items start the divestment process before even being normally used. These items are those that carry the highest risk of unused utility. During this stage, emotional attachment can start to be developed as a result of experiences that consolidate the item as cherished. It is also during this stage that the reinforcement of using a specific item can occur. This stage is also the one in which the use can be reinforced by social endorsement.

- **Second-class**

This sub-category refers to the items that have lost partially or totally their function or the appearance does not longer match the minimum required to be used. In this category, the item has lost some value.

- **Third-class**

Items that belong to this category have been reduce to its minimum functionality. In the case of clothing or furniture, they are not used in social spaces. Clothing is used for housework and furniture is moved to places that out of sight. An example of this situation is narrated by José, who declared to separate clothing items that are no longer wearable in other environments other than his house:

*What I do sometimes is to keep a pair of trousers to do some work at home, for example, painting the walls or something similar... (José, Moderate Greener)*

Similar cases were found in the category of furniture when participants relocate the item to places where the piece of furniture is not visible for other people apart from the inhabitants of the house. The item stays and works partially for its purpose.

### **5.3.3 What moves items among the divestment taxonomy categories?**

Divestment and consumption are practices that constitute part of the continuous configuration of lifestyles. Warde (2005) talked about consumption as a moment in many other practices. Cooking and travelling, for example, require the acquisition of new items in order to be enacted. The results of the interviews revealed that, as with consumption, divestment is also related to other practices.

Practices linked to divestment are those that determine how value-waste negotiations are carried out by people, moving the items from one category in the divestment taxonomy to another. Other practices can be the motives for items to reach the physical divestment point. Junctures in life were described by Glover as an opportunity to create new paths of practice; the divestment of material possessions in these junctures helps to establish these changes (Glover, 2015, p. 128). In other words, divestment is also the materialisation of new practices.

Divestment is a resource for when moments of change in life happen and they need to be assimilated through materiality. While Glover (2015) identified the existence of junctures in the divestment practice, the present study provides further arguments for the discussion, identifying two types of junctures:

- Immaterial junctures. Changes or turning points in the life of a person that agitate them emotionally.
- Material junctures. When changes in the lifestyle of a person occur and they involve practical changes. They cause a transformation in the way a person conduct their lives.

An example of material juncture is the practice of moving into a new place. This practice was frequently mentioned by the participants as the moment in which they decided to discard furniture and, in some cases, to buy new pieces for the new house:

*This a bookshelf that I have had for a long time but, I am about to move to my new house, and I am not going to take it with me... no way! It is too ugly... I mean, it was cool once, but it is not anymore (Mara, Mexico, Detached).*

An immaterial juncture is related with other moments in life, such as getting a new job, getting married, or mourning a loved one. The participants declared these moments to be key for discarding some possessions and getting new ones. Paula talks about her experience when she found a new job and suddenly she was immerse in a new environment for her:

*"...That is when I said... why am I wearing this? A simple t-shirt and a simple pair of jeans! I felt very uncomfortable in that environment and that is what made me reflect about myself... I think I need another type of personal image, something that makes me feel more comfortable and that allows me to be considered because, I have seen that if I keep dressing like this, it is easy to go unnoticed... If I am planning to have a promotion in my job, I need to change my style. It has been very clear to me that in this context the way you look is important (Paula, Mexico, Moderate greener)*

The experience of Paula reflects upon these immaterial junctures. When she got a new job and suddenly felt that the clothes that she would wear normally were no longer appropriate for the new lifestyle. This was an event that made her think about getting rid of clothes that, before that experience, were part of her daily outfits.

Both immaterial and material junctures are divestment moments in which owners reconfigure their lifestyles and these changes have an impact on their material possessions. Divestment helps to materialise these changes. Under this logic, it can be argued that in these scenarios divestment is not about divestment *per se*. It is relevant



to highlight this point because research in the field of longevity of products has focussed mainly on functionality and performance, while these examples demonstrate that discarding objects includes a component that can only be understood under the practice perspective.

In summary, immaterial and material junctures affect the divestment flow. The results of this study indicate that divestment can be gradual or abrupt according to the type of juncture or change that occurs to people in their lives. A gradual divestment indicates that possessions start to slowly lose some of their value, as it was shown through the different categories of the divestment taxonomy. An abrupt divestment can also occur when junctures in life make the items lose the value that the owner previously conferred to them. Both of them are intersections of practices.

#### **5.3.4 Practices attached to divestment**

Divestment is a moment in many practices. This means that the divestment occurs in an apparent abrupt way when something happens in the life of people. Participants mentioned frequently a set of practices that were linked to divestment in specific categories of items.

Figure 5.10 presents the practices that divestment is linked to, according to the gathered qualitative data. These practices are attached to the three different units of observation: clothing, furniture and mobile phones. Some of these practices are shared between the three different categories of products, while some are specific to one of them.



**Figure 5.10.** Divestment as a moment in other practices

For furniture, divestment was linked to residence relocation, refurbishments and redecorations, getting married and becoming a parent. The case of Jane explores the situation of becoming a parent which requires a modification of home spaces that leads to the divestment of a piece of furniture:

*Now that I am expecting baby, we are kind of reinvigorating that kind of search to declutter and create some more space for the baby so, this piece of furniture is something that we identified as something that we want to get rid of (Jane, United Kingdom, Authentic Greener).*

In the case of clothing, practices like getting a new job, travelling, going on a diet, bonding with different social circles, parenting or being part of social events or celebrations. The last one is an important case to highlight because the items used for social events tend to be worn a few times and then owners decide to get rid of them. This is the case of Sarah, who described her experience with a dress that she was planning to discard:

*"I bought it for Saint Patrick's Day. My mom and dad are Irish so they always have a big celebration and you have to wear green. Otherwise my mom gets very upset. My last green dress that I've been wearing for a few years, it shrunk in the wash, so I needed something new... I bought this one and then I decided to get rid of it this Saint Patrick's Day. I bought a new green dress, so I thought I don't really need it, green is not something that I wear that much so I thought, I'll get rid of this one, I've got the new one" (Sarah, Moderate greener, United Kingdom).*

*"I just came across it when I was sorting things out... and I thought: 'Okay, I'm rarely sleekly', particularly now that I am expecting a baby, there is no way I'm going to wear this tiny stretchy glittery dress. And I think, after the baby is due, I will back and think, how did I wear that? So, recently said, right, into the charity bag..." (Jane, Moderate Greener, United Kingdom)*

For mobile phones, practices like travelling, upgrading or catching up with acquaintances, ending up relationships was also mentioned as the reason for the divestment of a phone:

*"I've got this phone, when my marriage was breaking down because I think we were on the same card. So, I just went shopping for a new phone that was not on his card. That's the only thing I can remember. I think it was people encouraging me and the family to have a new phone... it wouldn't necessary occur to me on my own to just go shopping for a new phone" (Katie, Pragmatic, United Kingdom).*

The practice of travelling was mentioned by some participants as a reason for replacing their phones. In the case of mobile devices, the replacement was directly linked with the divestment. Some participants declared that doing a trip or taking a holiday was the main motivation for this divestment-replacement practice:

*"I was going on a Easter Holiday and I thought... well if I'm going to make the switch and buy one of these fancy new phone that does everything, over the Easter holiday I'll have time to learn how to work it so I went in the shop and I've seen an advert with the offer they were doing maybe the days before" (Lesley, Moderate Greener, United Kingdom).*

All these examples illustrate how practices of divestment are interconnected with lifestyles and routines. Activities for leisure, for work, for having a family, for creating social relationships are triggers for the divestment practice. Becoming a parent, for example, was mentioned for the three categories of products: people decided to divest clothing, furniture and replace their mobile phone because they were expecting a baby. Findings also put in evidence that the previously mentioned practices were also the reasons why an item acquires or loses value, and it is always negotiated with the new practices that people are introducing in their lives.

## **5.4 Exploring the intention-action gap in the physical divestment stage**

The longitudinal component of the research consisted of gathering data after the interviews to analyse the experience of the participants after a period of time. This component of the study had the purpose of analysing the intention-action gap in the physical divestment to observe if there was any variation of the declared intentions in the interview and to identify any constraints arising when people intended to divest their items in one way or another.

Figure 5.11 shows the channels according to this second data collection (see Appendix G for a full version of the table). Interestingly, the results show that the binning and selling intention was reduced, whilst the keeping channel was declared as more used compared to the intentions stated in the interviews. Keeping is a common channel in this dataset, although it is a non-conclusive information; some participants declared to keep their items for three different reasons: because they repurposed it, because they needed to keep it momentarily or because they still had not found the right channel for divesting the item. In the category of mobile phones, keeping was still a common answer and the reasons stated by participants were the difficulty to find a recycling point or the lack of information.

The category of furniture also shows interesting results. Participants repurposed some of the items they were planning to get rid of, although they declared this was a provisional alternative to the physical divestment and they were waiting for new items to arrive and replace the old piece of furniture. Some participants in the United Kingdom declared that, instead of binning the old furniture, they used the local council service and requested a collection. After this, the council is in charge of evaluating the item and either recycle the parts or donate it to a charitable institution. Changes in the intention-action in Mexico were mainly on how clothing was divested. Three out of the fourteen interviewees decided to donate their clothing to charitable institutions (via local churches).

Overall, findings show that a large proportion of the items were enabling the recirculation by using the different channels with variations between the two different stages. These findings, although might not represent a big change in terms of recirculation, apparently, show that divestment seems to take unexpected roads due to new circumstances in people's life. The complexity of divestment is also evident through these unforeseen variations.

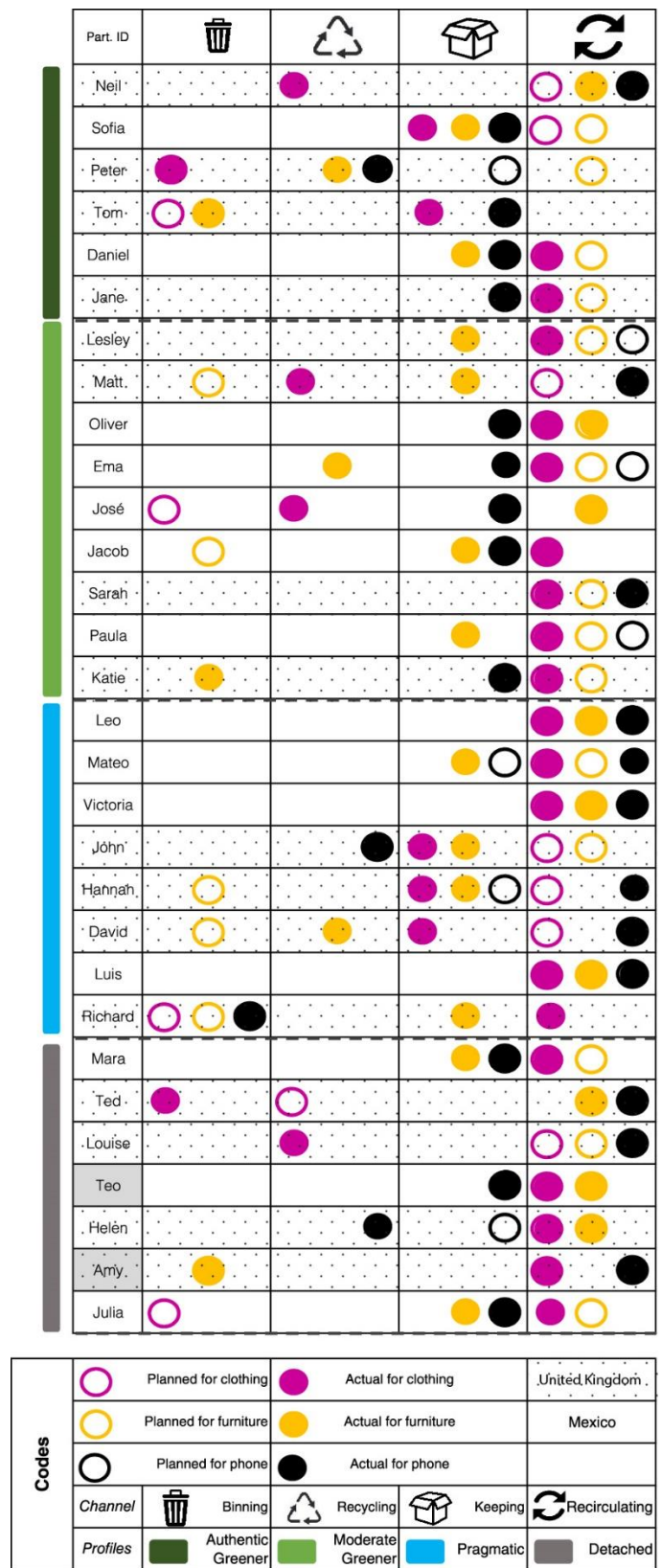


Figure 5.11. Intention vs actual divestment channel by participant and product type.

## **5.5 Contextual factors shaping divestment process. Why are the different channels chosen?**

The divestment taxonomy explored the process of divestment, making possible to better understand how the divestment negotiations impact lifespans of products. The taxonomy also puts in perspective the divestment activities by relating them to the outside world, connecting them with other practices. As part of this analysis, it is also possible to describe how every category is linked to contextual factors. In other words, the taxonomy enables to identify which categories in the divestment process are culturally dependant or independent.

The context under the social practice lens was described as the space in which values, infrastructures and sociohistorical conditions converge to give birth to particular settings (Section 2.4.4). One of the research questions was to know how contextual factors shape divestment practices and the present study explores two cultural units to answer this question. Findings show that even though both cultural units share elements in the divestment process, significant differences are situated in two particular moments: the physical divestment and the virtual divestment stage.

In the taxonomy, the physical divestment was described as the moment when a physical disconnection between the item and the owner occurs, in addition to a mental or emotional one. However, another dimension can be investigated: the channel through which the item is divested. The way in which people discard their items was briefly presented in section 5.2.1 to provide an overview of the divestment channels. However, the channels of divestment are presented in-depth in this section in order to understand how these practices are configured throughout daily life experiences and routines.

One of the principles of sustainable consumption is reducing the amount of materials and products as well as the amount of waste. The taxonomy of divestment allows to identify moments that are ideal for interventions, in order to enable recirculation of both materials and items. It also provides data to know how it would be possible to make these interventions. The categories of virtual and physical divestment represent a great opportunity to make these contributions. Hence, practices that are linked to both categories were analysed under the concept of the 'architectures of practices' with the aim of identify how these practices are "constituted within specific conditions and arrangements" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 156), which means to identify how contextual factors shape the effective and virtual divestment stages.

Even though effective and virtual divestment occur in both countries, practices linked to each category differ from one another. Divestment is not only a matter of getting rid of things, as it was observed in the taxonomy. It is intertwined with other practices and it is *per se* a practice that blends together meanings, relations and actions. Therefore, it also represents part of who we are as individuals and as a society. The ways in which divestment is executed in both countries, including the preferred channels, is also a way to disclose certain social dynamics:

Human coexistence is inherently tied, not just to practices, but also to material arrangements. Indeed, social life, as indicated, always transpires as part of a mesh of practices and arrangements: practices are carried on amid and determinative of, while also dependent on and altered by, material arrangements (Schatzki, 2010 cited in Blue and Spurling, 2017, p. 32)

The material arrangements for practices are associated with the context as the field for practitioners to enact divestment. These differences are strongly linked to contextual conditions and two different type of elements were identified in the participants' experiences. When participants described their experiences related to the effective and the virtual divestment stages, they were also framing the constraints they faced, as well as the intentions behind each practice. Gregson et al. (2007b) described divestment as a practice in itself, arguing that it has its own dynamics. Divestment activities, she argues: "not only work to move objects along but work back, as practices, on their divestors" (p. 198). This study found elements to support this notion and by following this principle, it also attempts to describe which elements are part of the divestment practice by analysing the architectures of it through the participants' doings, sayings and relatings around the divestment channels.

The experiences of using the different channels were captured under the supposition that the different profiles of participants would have different aims and intentions for using specific channels for divestment. By following sustainable consumption principles, this implies that authentic or moderate greeners would show a resolute interest in channels that promoted recirculation of products or materials and, as the counterpart, the detached profile would show no concern about choosing one channel or another with disregard of the implications. Nevertheless, findings showed that green profiles did not show consistency in their divestment activities. This finding was unexpected and suggests that the acceptance, adoption or rejection of any channel for divestment is based under different principles.

This statement, in addition to show that there is no individual consistency in relation to ethical consumption principles, also shows that there are elements in the practice of divestment that do not correspond with the acquisition stage. Findings

further support the idea that the contextual differences between both cultural units represent a central factor for divestment practices. With the aim of identifying precisely which elements were present in each different channel for effective divestment, some experiences narrated by the participants when using the different channels for divesting their possession are described in this section.

### 5.5.1 Binning

Participants' sayings around binning are mainly negative. The participants on the whole demonstrated an aversion towards binning any of the three types of product. Only very few of the interviewees declared openly to use this channel as a way to get rid of their possessions, but adding that it was not a regular practice. Declarations on binning expressed that binning was exclusive for items that could no longer be donated due to their bad conditions, or items that was not possible to repair or that nobody would want.

Although this was the overall opinion, data revealed different nuances in this practice, showing that intentions can differ when binning a product. This is the case of Mexico where is a common practice to leave items in public skips on the streets. The idea of participants that declared to bin their possessions is that they would have a second life because people that walk by and need the item, or people who work in the collection service would take them:

*"...one of the things that I do is, once I knew the rubbish collection system, in which they use the skips... there is a lot of people that goes and get the stuff that they need... so we put it in a bag and leave it on top of the skip..." (Julia, Detached, Mexico)*

Narratives on binning goods tend to be negative and therefore some participants declared not to consider binning as an option, particularly with electronics because they acknowledged that this practice might be environmentally harmful. Hence, the majority of informants declared to be specifically careful with electronic waste compared to clothing or furniture:

*"...I generally try make use of things and it's only if it's broken, or not usable any more that I would either throw it away or if it was like electrical, I shall recycle it rather than just put it in a normal bin..." (Louise, Detached, United Kingdom).*

There is a widespread understanding that waste generation is undesirable. Hence, the interviews captured only a few examples of how binning practices are carried out. Even when this could seem a bias in the results, the architectures of practice also aim to shed some light on the sayings around the practice. Thus, findings help to conclude that



cultural-discursive arrangement of this practice encloses a collective social arrangement for reducing the amount of waste.

### 5.5.2 Recycling

Recycling is generally perceived as an environmentally friendly practice, although some studies (Hoornweg and Bhada-Tata, 2012; Zero Waste Europe, 2019) have shown that, in terms of efficiency and waste, it tends to be less beneficial than other practices for recirculation that do not involve reprocessing the materials. The experiences of participants with recycling are in agreement with data showed in previous sections in relation to this matter. This is the case of Tom, who declared that, even when he knows the old electronic items have no value, he would never bin them:

*“...Most likely take it to the tip but there is also a bin where you put electronics, and you can put them there, I’ve seen that before. Because of environmental reasons, I rather to put them instead of the landfill...” (Authentic greener, United Kingdom).*

Informants tend to recycle when there are options nearby and the infrastructures of places provide sufficient elements for doing so:

*“...It is really hard to find where to recycle electronics, I can see it here at my work but not as part of my personal habits...” (Richard, Detached, United Kingdom)*

In terms of clothing and furniture, recycling seems to be the less mentioned channel among participants. Repeatedly, participants declared to bin with the expectations that local councils would manage the waste in order to recycle the elements that could be reprocessed. Since there is no information around this, the practice of recycling seems inconclusive in terms of how participants perceived it, even when they express to be in favour of it.

Consistently with the national account report (2.5.2) and the survey results (4.1.2), recycling was less popular with participants from Mexico compared to those from the United Kingdom. In the case of electronics, even when, in both countries, participants identified several difficulties to find recycling points, the ones from Mexico had less knowledge on how or where to find recycling points. In the case of clothing and furniture, the situation was more uncertain since, containers that might be for rubbish were described as recycling and vice versa.

Institutions seem to play an important role in this practice since, participants mentioned that when they recycled electronics, it was through the institutions where

they work, or a specific department of local councils, among others. As observed in the above-mentioned case of Richard, there were a few participants in both countries that determined that institutions are relevant or even decisive for them to be able to recycle his unwanted furniture:

*“...Another option for getting rid of it would be to take the item to a green point<sup>11</sup> and then the government would be in charge of managing it, but there are only a few of these points around the city and is not practical at all... people tend not to use this service because there is no time, they are quite far... also selling stuff is again, investing time that at this moment I am not able to waste...”*

Summarising, qualitative data illustrate that participants would be more or less prone to use this channel for divestment according to the infrastructures that are provided.

### **5.5.3 Keeping**

Although this category is part of the taxonomy of divestment (5.3), it is also included here to better understanding the practices of keeping items that are no longer in use. For most of the participants, the practice of keeping, in particular mobile phones, was an environmentally friendly practice. Virtual divestment in this category is justified under an environmental argument: the majority of participants who retain old mobile phones indicated that by doing so they are helping the environment by preventing devices from entering into the waste stream. Even though this is a statement which is true for the three types of goods, the intentions of not harming the environment were exclusively mentioned in this category.

When the scenario of finding a recycling point for electronics was described as a difficult task for participants, the second divestment scenario was to keep the phones at home with no further questions. Some of the participants declared that if they had more time or more information, they would be willing to give the items away. Some others declared that if they could get a reasonable amount of money, they would not have any problem with selling them. However, in practical terms, the option of keeping the phones was the most convenient in terms of benefits and energy spent in the practice:

*“...I am still keeping my old phones because I don't know how to get rid of them... or maybe I haven't searched how to do it in a responsible way... I think there are*

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<sup>11</sup> Waste management establishments run by the government in Mexico in which recyclable materials are collected.

*two reasons: I don't know how I should do it and the time that I need to back up the information that they have..."* (Jacob, Moderate Greener, United Kingdom)

Keeping was justified under arguments like: "it is possible that I would use it in the future", "it is a back-up device in case mine fails". Still, this practice seems to be strongly related to the material value that these devices used to have and the money that can be obtained for selling it (as electronic waste or as a functional device) appear to be insufficient: "too good to sell it for a small amount, too functional to give it away". Taken together, these results suggest that keeping the items represents an option that, although is not contributing directly with sustainable consumption principles, it causes no harm by avoiding binning the products when other channels like recycling, donating or selling seem inadequate for the participants.

#### **5.5.4 Selling**

Participants in both cultural units present significant differences in relation to the ways for selling items and how this practice is perceived by practitioners. In the United Kingdom there is more acceptance towards selling items that owners are no longer using. Although this was already explored in section 5.2.1, qualitative data helped to create an in-depth picture of the reasons. In the United Kingdom, the use of online selling platforms is more spread than in the Mexican context. Hence, participants declared to consider this as a convenient way to divest their items since it is an easy task to do in order to get the benefits of selling a product:

*"...I am actually going to sell it that would probably go on e-bay... I am not in any rush to sell it, when I do sell clothes on this online platform... I will have a look on similar things and match the price... there is no point on going very high... I use this platform frequently, it is very useful, together with another two, are my main platforms for selling items. Everyone uses them, it is a wide country market..."* (John, Pragmatic, United Kingdom).

Although opinions differed on how convenient is to sell items through online platforms across participants from the United Kingdom, the majority expressed to have a positive attitude towards it, indicating the acceptance of this practice. In contrast, selling "in person" was not mentioned as a common practice. The opposite is observed in the case of Mexico where participants declared not feeling comfortable with it. They declare to rather give the item to a member of the family or to a friend, instead of trying to get a benefit from selling it. Some cases of selling items were reported but participants

emphasise the fact that, by doing so, they are not looking for a monetary benefit and the main intention is to give the items a new cycle:

*"I would like to try to sell this, maybe to get some money back... But not because it worth much, but it is not a piece of furniture that has such a low dignity to drive it to the bin" (José, Moderate greener, Mexico)*

*"... I have some experiences in selling appliances, for example, there are buyers passing by my street; what they do is to collect items and reuse the parts, but they don't really pay too much. It is more about the service they provide to take the item away and you don't have to do anything..." (Mateo, Pragmatic, Mexico)*

These views demonstrate that selling is not perceived as a high-value practice in the Mexican context. Figure 5.4 shows that the number of participants that declared selling as the divestment channel for some of their items was bigger than those that declared to actually sell them when the longitudinal study was carried out (Figure 5.11), showing that participants faced difficulties to meet their intents. The use of online platforms was mentioned in both countries as a common practice for acquiring items; however, for selling them in United Kingdom there seems to be more openness towards this channel.

### **5.5.5 Giving to friends and family**

Even though this channel is chosen in both cultural units, it seems to be more important in Mexico than in the United Kingdom. Figure 5.11 shows that three times more people in Mexico declared to use this channel than in the United Kingdom. Giving away unwanted items away to family and friends was frequently mentioned in both countries as an option but, in practical terms, it is more regularly performed in Mexico.

Passing on clothes among family members is another practice that participants declared to do frequently. They also declared to give items in the occasion of relatives or friends forming a new family. Surprisingly, when experiences were tracked in the opposite direction, i.e. participants getting second-hand items from family members, experiences were both positive and negative. In furniture, for example, some participants even associated this practice with heirlooms. The negative side of the practice was mentioned with some pieces of clothing. The fact that there are positive and negative associations with donations from family and friends also reveals how social dynamics occur. Mara, through her experience:

*"...My cousin used to pass on to me all the clothing that she didn't want. Because she was rich, we were the poor family. And I was always wearing brand clothes but because they were passed on to me. So, all my childhood I wore second-hand*

*clothes, and I think I was kind of traumatised by that..."* (Mara, Detached, Mexico)

This cannot be generalised, since, as previously mentioned, some other participants had a positive impression on giving and receiving items from friends and family. However, the fact is that in this type of channel the family dynamics also can be highlighted by tracing who is the person that receives, who is the one that gives the items away and how the items are received.

### **5.5.6 Donating to charities**

This channel was reported to be used with more frequency in the United Kingdom than in Mexico. Participants in the UK consider donations to charity as an activity that has benefits for both environment and society. The practice is socially accepted and it represents a source of proud, as informants mentioned. Participants' sayings around donation are frequently referred to altruistic intentions. Systems for donations through charities are formally established as a civil association in the United Kingdom, whilst in Mexico the charities that participants used to donate unwanted items are allocated through different churches.

The fact that charities are older and legally constituted institutions provides them with strength that encourages people to consider them as a trusted option for donating their possessions, with the additional benefit of helping a cause. This channel was explored in the interviews from participants in the United Kingdom in order to know how did they talk about their experiences with donations to charities. Surprisingly, instead of experiences centred in choosing a charity for a particular cause and the willingness to contribute to it, participants described the use charities as part of their routines:

*"...I think the charity that I tend to donate things is probably BHF, because there is a local store where I live... it is because of proximity, there is no other reason..."*  
(David, Pragmatic, United Kingdom)

Practices in charities have evolved through time. Some participants have started to choose charities because they offer other type of material benefits such as points or vouchers that can be exchanged for goods. In some cases, this was also a reason that motivated participants to donate to a specific charity:

*"...I am donating to this charity because the item is from an specific brand, and I can get a £5 voucher from the charity institution, if I hand it in... So, I have a lot of things from this brand cueing up to get to the charity when I know what I want*

*to do with the voucher so that's why is not disposed yet..."* (Helen, Detached, United Kingdom).

The experiences also reveal that practitioners can develop a set of skills through their experiences in order to make the most of their donations. From using the charity bags that charities leave through their doors to collect points for getting rewards, practitioners engage with donation practices as a way to be socially responsible but, at the same time, to get benefits from it.

A restriction that participants reported to consider when having the intention of donating some items to charities was that the quality of the item had to be acceptable. Most participants from the United Kingdom described experiences in which they did not know if the item had enough quality to be accepted by a specific charitable institution, or which charity had higher or lower standards of quality. With furniture, the fact that some materials might not have the regulations established by the law, prevents the items to be divested through this channel:

*"I want to get rid of this piece of furniture and I was planning to give to a charity but... you see? That's the problem in England... norms are very strict. So, probably a charity shop wouldn't take it because things have changed so much in 10 years regarding regulations"* (Ted, Detached, United Kingdom).

Section 2.4.4 described how context reflects the socio-historical conditions that are important for a practice to become regular in a society. The case of charities is an example of how history has an effect on social practices. Although donation experiences were different among participants, they share two main characteristics: charities are mainly chosen out of convenience and, the identification of the charitable institution is important for participants. It has to be a recognised organisation in order to be trusted by donors. In general terms, donating to charities as a divestment channel is an activity that is normalised across the United Kingdom, but not in Mexico.

### **5.5.7 Donating/Giving to employees**

An equivalent practice to donation to charities in terms of the social rewards that it represents to participants in the United Kingdom is the channel of donation to employees in Mexico. This practice is not found in any of the experiences of the participants from the United Kingdom, but it is mentioned by most of the participants in Mexico as convenient and altruistic.

*“...The case of our employees, for example, we always give them the clothes and other items that we don't longer want; and they come to work, you see them very happy wearing the garments that were yours and this, somehow makes you feel good because it is not a total discarding, someone else benefits from the item...”*  
(Oliver, Moderate Greener, Mexico)

This practice tends to establish links between the divestor and the new owner of the items. However, according to the gathered data, this is not the main reason why participants declared to use this channel. The reasons for choosing this channel are similar to those considered for the other channels: it is convenient (proximity) and it provides sufficient social benefits for participants.

Having a person that helps with the cleaning at home is a regular practice in Mexico and most commonly the participants declared to donate the items that they do not want to them. Some participants that have their own business also donate to people that work for them the things that they do not need at home, including furniture, clothing, and even mobile phones. Arguably, this is another socio-historical condition immersed in the Mexican context, since the differences between social classes are larger compared to the United Kingdom. In the case of this practice, the role of class is important. It talks about a more vertical social hierarchy where inequality is normalised and goods move along this hierarchy.

Practices around channels for divestment helped to identify which elements are present when participants face the effective and virtual divestment stages. The actions (effective divestment) contributed to understand why is done what is done. The constraints participants declared before choosing a channel (virtual divestment) outline the intentions. Together, they provide the foundations for identifying the elements present in the channels for divestment.

## **5.6 Elements in the channels for physical divestment**

Qualitative data provided by participants allowed to identify the elements behind the physical divestment. These findings provide support for the conceptual premise that there are two elements of different nature when a channel for divestment is selected.

- **Tangible elements.** All the elements that one way or another are linked to materiality. They are related to infrastructures such as points for collection, institutions.

- Intangible elements. They do not manifest through materiality, but through contextual elements such as moral, norms, rules, values, social interactions, experience and knowledge accumulated by people.

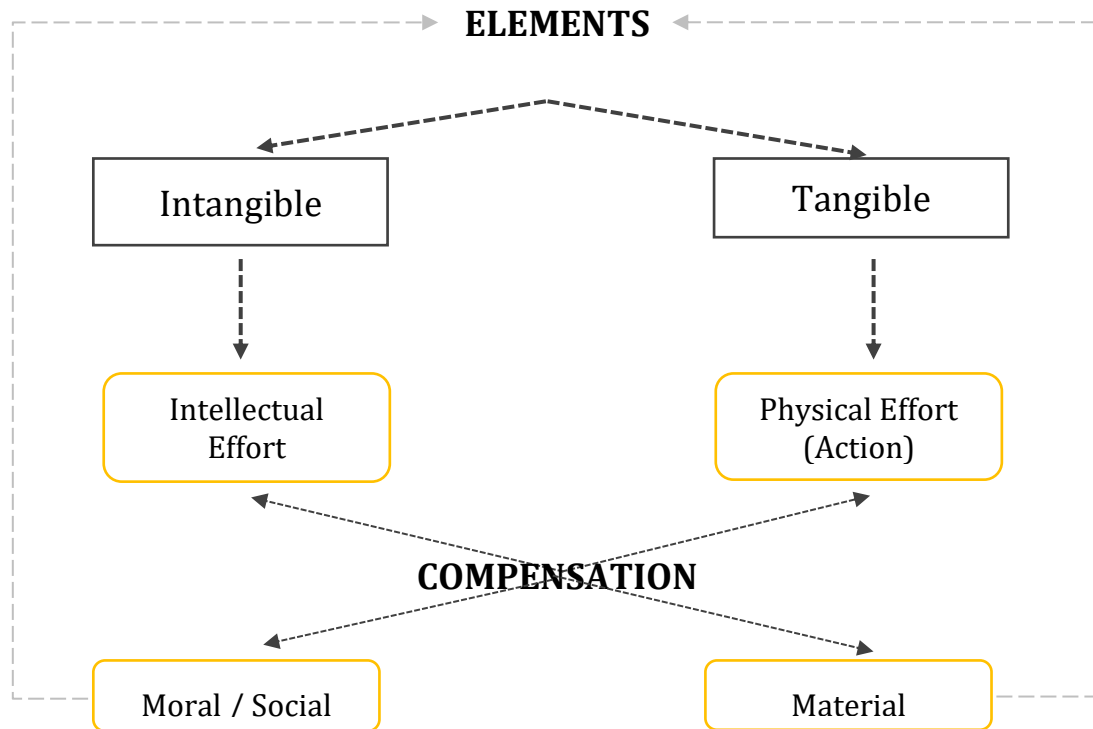
Findings suggest that, as throughout the divestment process, this stage is a negotiation between the tangible and intangible elements. Both types of elements imply efforts, either intellectual, which refers to the process of selecting, and physical, which is related to the process of enacting a practice.

The tangible and intangible elements (Figure 5.12) have been proven to provide a compensation or reward that works as a trigger or motivation. The divestor can perceive an outcome from the practice that can be linked either to moral or a material reward. Practitioners are skilled in enacting ways of divestment. The rewards are always in relation to how the context has determined specific value for certain practices. It is the case, for example, of the divestment of mobile phones by participants in this study. Reasons for keeping the devices are the high material value that is attributed to the item against the perceived small benefit that can be obtained from this practice. The values can also be contextually negotiated and the divestment channel can become a culturally-dependant component of the divestment process.

When choosing a channel for divesting their items, a recurrent theme amongst interviewees was an evaluation of the simplicity of accessing the channel and a reflection upon how competent they feel in terms of its practice. It is for this reason that concepts like easy, hard, convenient or even practical were frequently used to describe these experiences. The fact that participants described their experiences when enacting divestment as *easy* or *hard* demonstrates that the convenience of one channel or another is mediated also by the context with intangible or intangible elements.

Something that is categorised as easy implies that the energy invested and the compensation that can be perceived by the divestors is well-balanced and sufficient. As previously stated, divestment is not exclusively an activity to dispose of something. It is also linked to other social activities such as connections, reinforcements of relationships or identities. It is for this reason that the divestor is in constant negotiation with the feedback provided by the context. Values and norms will allow her or him to produce the most convenient outcome.





**Figure 5.12.** Elements in the physical divestment practice.  
Adapted from Encino-Muñoz et al. (2019).

From the social practice perspective, some authors have discussed theoretically the role of practitioners in a particular practice (Dreier, 2009; Guzman, 2013). The fact that practitioners and structures are in constant interaction provides the practice with dynamism, which implies, for example, that an outcome that could work in a specific period of time will not provide the same reward in a different moment. Empirical data gathered as part of this study show that, since we live now in a period in which ethical consumption is a norm, any practice linked to that will provide a great social reward. If it were the case that, instead of perceiving recirculation as something positive, not recirculating items is the norm, then social and moral rewards would be re-structured according to this new scenario. This is actually how a practice can transform itself through enacting it.

Infrastructures play an important role for implementing changes towards more sustainable ways of living. However, from the social practice perspective, the interaction of infrastructures with other elements such as culture and values are also an important part for enacting a practice. In the physical divestment practice, participants evaluated their experience with the different channels. Ted, when deciding what to do with the old jeans that he was no longer wearing, expressed:

*“Possibly it’s a good idea to recycle, there is a lot of containers in my town to recycle, even the shoes and so... Now that I think about it, I like this idea better than throw them away. When I said put them in the bin, I didn’t mean it. I meant, I was going to put them in the recycling container” (Detached, United Kingdom)*

The intangible and tangible elements that generated the outcome of recycling the pair of jeans are identified in his experience: the tangible element appears when he recognises that near his house there are several points for collection. The intangible element appears later, when, after reflecting upon his words, he realises that the fact that recycling is morally correct or socially acceptable would generate a convenient reward for the practice. This view was echoed by another informant who put in evidence the role of the material rewards that a specific channel for divestment can provide:

*“...At the moment, we have a charity shop that is close to where we live. They do a gift aid scheme where you can sign up with them, give them your details just once and have a card so anytime you donate you just show your card. You don’t have to provide your name and address and take the gift aid box every time, you just show the card. So, we tend to... over time, one of the bags that we fill with things that we don’t want anymore and there is clothing or dvds or books, and when it kind of gets full we take it down there. So, this has gone straight into that bag, without too much of thought really... With kind a nerve that would be other opportunities that I might could try selling some other items but for convenience we take it to the charity...” (Jane, Authentic Greener, United Kingdom).*

A number of elements make of the practice of donation to this specific charity something very convenient in tangible and intangible aspects, such as: i) the distance from Jane’s place to the charity shop, ii) the fact that she considers to save some time since she is already registered with this charity, and iii) the fact that the institution keeps her data in anonymity. Material rewards can be even more visible when they are reduced to money or coupons that can be spent in shopping. The case of Helen provides another view from the intangible and tangible elements in channels for divestment; referring to donations to charity, she expressed how convenient for her was to donate to a specific charity, comprising both material and social rewards:

*“...If you become a member of the charity organisation, you get an official number... then you get points with your donations... It is like a membership program... with rewards and everything! Now a major motivator for me is that you get ‘nectar’ points, which is the latest in our relationship with the charity organisation...”*

It can therefore be inferred that her motivation for divesting through donation is not solely an altruistic act. She found herself engaged in a new experience that is partly the beginning of a new consumption cycle and partly the excitement of mastering the

donation process, providing a different type of reward. Overall, Helen perceives the donation system as both convenient and altruistic; she finds it a resource to get some moral and material rewards. It is an experience that is part of her consumption-divestment practices from which she tries to get the most benefits as possible.

Turning now to the intangible elements of divestment, the intellectual effort was another relevant component that participant reported to be significant for selecting one of the channels for divestment. The use of a charity, a selling platform or even a recycling scheme involve a specific set of skills and knowledge that need to be mastered in order to increase the *convenience* of a practice in tangible terms.

The concept of Emotional energy (EE) was discussed as part of the elements that the context provides when enacting any kind of practice. It refers to the result of the excitement and enjoyment that practitioners find when carrying out a practice (Spaargaren, 2013). EE was displayed by participants when they felt they were doing something good (associated with altruism) and also when they talked about mastering any practice for channels for divestment. Informants referred to their channels of divestment as easy or hard to manage also by contrasting the use of them with the practical knowledge that requires to put them in to practice:

*“Many years ago my job was actually running an e-bay shop through a charitable institution and I put a lot of stuff on e-bay for them so I think I am very well used to using it, I’m quite good at it so I know the best way of selling things, and what would sell and what won’t. So, for my things, if something isn’t that good quality I know I won’t get that much money I rather give it to a charity shop but if it’s something that is quite expensive, special or unique then I’m quite confident to put it up and use the right words I think people search for thing”* (Sarah, Moderate Greener, United Kingdom).

Knowing how to get the best of any specific channel for divestment is also an element that plays an important role in the practice. Knowledge in the practice theory has been previously recognised by Alkemeyer and Buschmann (2017) as learning. Owning the information is not the only part of enacting a practice. It is very possible that most of the participants have some knowledge regarding online selling; however, the learning implies a higher level of involvement that requires praxis: “learning cannot be understood as the passive acquisition of operational skills. Instead, people (trans)form themselves via their engagement as recognisable subjects and cultivate their playability by learning to comply with the normative standards unfolding in praxis” (Alkemeyer and Buschmann, 2017).

The last example from Sarah illustrates how a practice can be adopted by practitioners through engaging with it. The authors discuss the concept of “en-

ablement” referring to the fact that people only become carriers of specific abilities through participation in practices. This subject will be discussed in the conclusions, but the example is relevant here to highlight how, in order to introduce changes in practices towards sustainable consumption, the “en-ablement” of practitioners is fundamental.

### **5.6.1 The context. Accounting for sociocultural factors**

In any society, there are norms, rules and values that, to some extent configure the culture of a place. From the social practice perspective, the culture in which consumption practice is carried out “embraces dynamic array of entities, processes, events, and rituals” (Nair and Little, 2016, p. 171). Hence, divestment practices were analysed under these principles, showing that divestment, through social forces establishes its own dynamics.

Consumers and divestors perform in a scenario that sets normality (what should be done) and what are the outcomes of specific actions. A context can be understood through its sociohistorical condition, the values and the morality that it encloses. Previously there has been an intellectual endorsement from Warde towards linking “understandings of practice to the ‘institutional or systemic conditions’ of their existence” (Evans, 2019, p. 513) recognising the need of accounting for the context in any social practice.

Within the practice theory perspective, the normative component of divestment becomes a more flexible concept by the understanding that the agents can negotiate within specific established structural procedures. The agency of a practitioner consists in exerting this agency under specific norms and procedures that are culturally dependent. These norms, in turn, follow appropriateness and correctness established in a particular society. Practitioners use the know-how and motivational knowledge within a practice to understand the world and themselves (Warde, 2005, p. 143). This is the case also for the practices of divestment and each cultural unit provides its own know-how’s. These features are discussed by Alkemeyer and Buschmann (2017) as part of the practitioners’ enablement towards an specific practice. Hence, norms and rules are important elements when studying channels for divestment in a specific context.

In the case of the acceptance and adoption of second-hand items use, most of the participants in Mexico expressed their aversion. Only a few participants declared to have a positive impression about acquiring second-hand items. The idea associated to these items is that they lack quality and that only that does not have enough monetary

resources to buy something new, would get them. This way, some participants were reluctant towards this practice:

*“...when I was younger and I didn’t have a position... well, my family was mid-class, but my dad passed away when I was about to start my degree and during that period, we were quite limited with the money that we had... Back in those days, I used to buy second-hand clothes... Now, I would not buy second-hand clothes neither for me, nor for my children because I can afford to buy new items...”* (Mateo, Pragmatic, Mexico).

Using second-hand clothing was also a matter of shame among some Mexican participants. Leo declared to feel embarrassed: “Between us, let me tell you that I use second-hand clothes occasionally” (Pragmatic, Mexico). This sentence puts in evidence that is confessed as a secret denotes a sense of shame within this practice.

Arguably, as previously mentioned associated with a matter of class. Additionally, the fact that socio-historic conditions did not allow to develop a formal second-hand market or that charitable institutions do not appear as formal institutions generates a negative perception of used items, since the places in which they are commercialised are informal establishments. It might be that all these arguments explain why participants are not actively engaged in the recirculation processes in a deeper way.

Donations to charity seem to have the opposite conception. Culturally, it is conceived as a matter of pride. All the participants have been engaged with donations to charities at least once and most of them do it regularly. Some of them also expressed to be happy to buy things from them. This might seem, at a first sight a more sustainable practice because it involves the recirculation for items. However, it was also found that by donating, the divestor seems to find a justification for new purchases. As a consequence, there might be a relation between the acquisition and divestment.

Every divestment practice has a meaning. It is carried out by practitioners knowing that is leading somewhere if carried in a specific way. What is normalised and is practice will create a specific reward that motivates the practitioner. What is not accepted, might not bring any reward and the practice might not be carried out. As we observed, Mexico and the United Kingdom have contextual differences that make divestment practices appropriate or not, under the principles that “doings, saying and relating only become intelligible within the pre-existing set of cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political conditions” (Nicolini, 2017a, p. 104). It is for this reason that donating to employees would be unfolded as a practice in Mexican context but not in the United Kingdom. The same case would apply for charities, in which,

material arrangements that are part of the practices allow it to be a widespread act in United Kingdom but not in Mexico.

Another contextual difference was found in the variations between channels for divestment. In terms of environmental impact at the stage of physical divestment, the presence of channels is similar in Mexico and the United Kingdom. However, differences between the two countries are in the way in which the channels of binning, recycling, selling and donating work. Figure 5.13 shows the main channel and the variations that it presents in each country. In general terms, Mexico relies relatively more in the informal alternatives for recirculation.

The survey (in section 4.1.2) showed how participants in the United Kingdom ranked the governmental institutions as an important agent for solving environmental problems (Figure 4.10). Participants from Mexico considered society and individuals more powerful agents to solve environmental problems than government institutions or the private sector (Figure 4.9). These results correspond to findings in the interviews: participants in the United Kingdom used more options linked to government institutions to divest unwanted items, whilst Mexican participants tended to use person-to-person channels for divesting their items.

Channel	Mexico	United Kingdom
<b>Binning</b>	Regular bin	Regular bin
	Skip (item prepared for informal collectors)	Not found
<b>Recycling</b>	Collection points managed by local council	Collection points managed by local council
	Collection points managed by goods providers	Collection points managed by goods providers
	Not found	Council Tax Collection
<b>Selling</b>	To friends and family	To friends and family
	Not found	Through online platforms
	Not found	Carboot Sale
	To informal buyers that reuse components	Not found
<b>Donating</b>	To charitable institutions	To charitable institutions
	To family and friends	To family and friends
	To church to be redirected	Not found
	To employees	Not found
	Not found	Swapping parties

Figure 5.13. Variations in channels by country.

## 5.6.2 Overview: Invest to divest

According to data, it can be inferred that the intellectual effort and physical effort are strongly mediated by the context. In the case of physical effort, there is a bigger influence of infrastructure and material conditions. In the case of the intellectual effort, values and culture are those that turn out to be more significant. Hence, the effort that a divestment practice requires is depending on the context in the sense that available options are the way in which user evaluates the convenience and practicality of the chosen divestment channel.

Schatzki discussed the relevance of materiality in any given social practice arguing that, the prefiguration of practices is an evaluation of “possible paths of action on such registers as easy and hard, obvious and obscure, tiresome and invigorating, short and long and so on” (2010, cited in Shove, 2017, p. 161). This description of the prefiguration of practices echoes with findings in this study on the divestment practice. Empirical data proves that participants’ narratives on divestment frequently make reference to concepts such as easy and hard (effort balance); known and unknown, which implies that divestment activities are measured by users with the energy amount that they need towards the divestment of any specific good.

In terms of materiality, an example would be how participants referred to a practice as *easy* to execute if points for divestment were close to their homes and they already knew the way this particular system works. This, in turn, result in more practiced actions. This data also shows that, regarding donations to charities, no pure altruistic intention was behind the in specific altruistic institutions or environmentally responsible organisations.

The outcome indicates a balance of effort (value-reward); time (infrastructure dependent/cities and locations) and knowledge (experience and embodiment of the practice in previous occasions) which is always mediated by contextual conditions, either material or culture. The feedback, determined by this negotiation, for any given act reinforces the practice itself and perpetuates the practice.

## 5.6.3 Divestment routines. Designing own systems for divestment

The social practice theory puts in perspective the actions of practitioners. Instead of accounting for actions as independent individual behaviours, it analyses the practice in conjunction with other factors. With the aim of exploring the architectures of practices



of divestment, the systems of divestment were studied to understand how important routines and habits in daily life are significant for divestment practices.

Data showed that divestment practices are routinised in different ways for each category of products. This means that systems for divestment are different among units of analysis. Clothing, furniture and mobile phones have their own systems of divestment in terms of the ways in which they are organised and carried out by participants. When participants were asked to describe their routines in the divestment activities, most of them were able to articulate it in a clearer way the routines of clothing compared to furniture or mobile phones. Participants elaborate in a more detailed way the activities they carry out when dealing with unwanted clothing items compared to the information they give when enquired about furniture and mobile phones.

The case of clothing is arguably the most complex one. Within clothing, divestment system was described by participants from both cultural units in terms of elements such as:

- Reaching points of saturation that demands a clearing out: It seems to be a specific limit that the wardrobe or storage reach in which the participants feel an urgency for getting rid of things. Decluttering was mentioned as a regular practice when this saturation points arrive. Mateo's case illustrates this saturation points in relation to the divestment practices:

*"I think is a subconscious relation between what I keep and what I throw away... Yes, I can say that sometimes my wardrobe is too full and then I start to take out some of my clothes but is not that this is the main motivation for getting rid of some items. Maybe is more casual... to be honest I always shop clothes when they are on sale so, if I get three or four shirts, I decide that I will have to take out some. But it is not structured"* (Pragmatic, Mexico).

- Seasonal check-up: Some participants declared to do this as part of their routines. When the next season arrives, or during holidays, they have a check-up of items that are not being used, but still in their wardrobes. They tend to group the pieces of clothing to proceed to the physical divestment stage.
- Replacement of items: Participants declared to organise their divestment activities in relation to the replacements they do. The *one enters-one leaves* system is also used by a few participants with less frequency.

These were the types of systems that were identified in data for the clothing category. Data about clothing revealed that divestment systems can occur gradually: participants

expressed that they also have classes in their possessions in which, once the item reach a very low quality on its performance, it is divested. The loss of value can be linked not only to the appearance of the item but also to other practices that reduce value once given to the item. Lesley narrated her experience with this process as follows:

*"...If it is something that has got really worn out then it would go into the recycling bin and if is something that is in reasonable condition, but I know that I'm not going to wear it because the style doesn't suit me or it's gone out of fashion or I'm too old to wear it, then I tend to put it in the charity bag. We get charity bags through the door pretty much every day... Some pieces I think of put it away one summer and then, the next summer, I get it out and it hangs in the wardrobe and I just never wear it because of the things that I'm choosing in front of it, and then the autumn comes again and it gets put back with the summer clothes... That's what happened to this really, being brought out and pulled back and then I thought, it is silly. It is time to get rid of it..."* (Lesley, Moderate Greener, United Kingdom)

In the case of furniture and mobile phones, identified systems of divestment were ruled by different principles. For example, in furniture, it is a more "straightforward" system, linked to other practices such as renewing or redecorating spaces, as well as up-sizing or down-sizing homes. As with mobile phones, furniture is a category that seems to find the greatest difficulties in the stage of virtual or physical divestment since the outer systems are apparently harder to understand or use, as participants declared. Furniture systems were related more to material conditions since selling, donating, recycling a piece of furniture requires more effort from participants in order to accommodate it properly:

*"...This charity is convenient because, they came and take a bed away from my house, a three-piece suite and a fireplace. Then, they take them back to the depot; it might need a bit of work done on it and repair it and they offer it to a reduced price, or they give them away to people that need that furniture..."* (Lesley, Moderate greener, United Kingdom).

Mobile phones do not have complex divestment systems. They are simpler than furniture in terms of factors and practices involved. It is mostly linked to direct replacement of old item with a newer one. The complexity of this category of products relies on the fact that, as shown in the channels for divestment, the items are stored and kept by the owners which creates difficulties for the recirculation of materials or even the devices themselves. In this case, the recirculation was made through two different systems: delivering the item to recycling points or selling via postal mail system to companies that recycle parts of electronic devices. This is a practice that was only narrated by participants in the United Kingdom, which is similar to the acceptance and popularity of online selling system used for clothing. A few names were mentioned by

participants and this option was considered as convenient since you can send the items through post and get some money back without investing much time. As observed, systems of divestment have particular rules and routines established by practitioners in relation to the context.

## **Chapter 6. Conclusions**

This thesis started by presenting the problems associated with contemporary patterns of consumption, their links to divestment and how these issues represent barriers for achieving sustainable patterns of consumption (Chapter 1). A review of the body of literature on consumption and divestment was conducted (Chapter 2). First, the consumer culture was presented as the current sociohistorical context (section 2.1). Then, a conceptual framework that brings together notions of the social practice theory and architectures of practices was introduced (section 2.4). This framework was the guide for addressing the aims of the research.

In Chapter 3 the methodological strategy was presented. A mixed methods research was conducted, taking elements from the cross-cultural research in order to examine how the context plays a role in the divestment process. The quantitative part of the research showed the main findings from the survey in the two countries (Chapter 4); it also sets the background for findings for the qualitative stage of the research. Chapter 5 presents the key elements of the divestment process: channels for divestment (sections 5.2 and 5.4), the taxonomy of divestment (section 5.3) and the contextual factors shaping the divestment process (section 5.5).

This chapter closes the study by presenting the key findings and the relevance of the study for the field of research (section 6.1). It follows by identifying moments for intervention to promote more sustainable ways of divestment (section 6.2). Then, it examines the implications that these findings have for design disciplines in relation to sustainable consumption (section 6.3). It also presents the limitations of the research (section 6.4). A summary and final remarks of the investigation are discussed in section 6.5. Finally, section 6.6 closes the chapter by identifying possible paths for further research.

### **6.1 Contributions of the study**

This study sought to find the elements that are part of the divestment process and how these elements shape divestment practices in order to know how to promoting effective alternatives for sustainable patterns of consumption. In doing so, the present thesis contributes to the body of knowledge in three different ways. Firstly, it analyses the

divestment practice to explain the elements of which it is composed. Secondly, it analyses the practice of divestment in relation to individual profiles to understand the influence of personal attitudes and behaviours. Finally, it identifies how cultural elements shape the divestment practice by comparing two different cultural units, enabling the possibility of providing culturally sensitive strategies for sustainable consumption. This section will summarise the main findings in these three areas.

### **6.1.1 Divestment practice and its elements**

Findings have suggested that divestment is a multi-layered complex process instead of a single action towards the disposal of material possessions. The results have shown that the divestment process for some items starts immediately after the acquisition and then, after their value starts to decrease, it moves through the different categories of the taxonomy. Moments in people's life also constitute a determinant factor in divestment. When situations occur to people and change their lives in meaningful ways, materiality is a conduit by which these changes are absorbed and communicated.

The taxonomy of divestment has shown how these changes shape the divestment process. Divestment is not a simple act, it is a complex process driven by a set of factors intersecting and generating an outcome that can be hard to predict. The process of divestment is the coexistence and conciliation of two concepts: value and waste. By constructing a taxonomy of divestment, it has been possible to identify the elements that shape the divestment process. These elements are those that generate the outcome of when and why the divestment process starts and how it is carried out by practitioners. These elements are categorised as follows:

- **Context. Physical and social space**

It is how the sociocultural environment shapes every stage in the process of divestment and the elements that it provides for each channel of divestment.

- **Situational factors. Divestment as a moment in other practices**

These factors are related to lifestyle and circumstances that occur to individuals. Moments on people's life also constitute a determinant factor in divestment. When situations occur to people and change their lives in meaningful ways, materiality is a conduit by which these changes are absorbed and communicated. It was observed how divestment is a moment in many other

practices. The material or immaterial junctures can accelerate or slow down the divestment process.

- **Sociohistorical factors. Immaterial prefiguration of divestment practice**

They are part of the divestment process in the contextual element. Sociohistorical conditions are a place in time and space. As observed through empirical data, they are the background in which any practice is carried out and established.

- **Material agency. The type of product**

Every type of product showed different divestment patterns. They have different systems for divestment and the level of appropriation for the three units of observation is also different. This has proven to have an impact on the way the item is divested.

Through the taxonomy of divestment, which has captured the moments of divestment and the processes through which possessions undergo, it has been possible to identify how these four dimensions are intertwined through lifestyles and routines. These dimensions have been observed in both cultural units although manifested in different ways. Layered within these divestment processes, there are other factors which can modulate and influence the process and flow of possessions through the taxonomy of divestment:

- Effort that the owner perceives from divestment practices.
- Knowledge for divesting possessions in specific ways
- Material infrastructures (variety of available channels)

These elements are considered of second order importance. They are contextually mediated and represent barriers or opportunities in the divestment process, because they enable or prevent practitioners from enacting the divestment through different channels.

The first and second order elements have shown how solutions centred on extending lifespans of products are not always the right answer. What has been understood as beneficial for the environment (i.e. longevity) might not be enough for promoting changes at a societal level and vice versa. For promoting effective alternatives for sustainable consumption, it is necessary to acknowledge the meaning and importance of goods in, at least, three different dimensions: cultural meanings,

social life and identity. These three concepts have an important role in terms of divestment and how the divestment process ultimately influences consumption.

### **6.1.2 The individual dimension in divestment practice**

The second contribution of this research is the analysis of how different individual consumer profiles divest their possessions. This study allowed to revise critically the perception about the green and ethical consumers by tracking participants' practices throughout the divestment stage to evaluate the correspondence of purchasing and divestment attitudes. Based on findings from the quantitative strand of the study (profiles of participants) and the qualitative data (divestment practices), it can be argued that the complexity of divestment cannot be predicted by characterising consumers and their attitudes towards ethical purchasing. It appears that these attitudes are significantly influenced by the first and second order divestment-specific factors mentioned above.

Since no correlation has been found between the individual intentions, attitudes and behaviours and the divestment practices, this thesis indicates that divestment practices are linked to other dimensions other than just a specific individual set of ethical attitudes. The participants on the whole demonstrated a balanced level of concern towards sustainable consumption patterns. Since there is no clear idea of what sustainable divestment is, there is a range of sustainable oriented practices such as keeping, donating and upcycling that are intuitively practiced and indirectly associated to sustainability.

By decentring the individual as the one who makes the decision of divesting something, which implies to assume that individuals do not have total agency in consumption and divestment practices, it is acknowledged that sociocultural settings, together with the context, are as determinant as the practitioner in the divestment process. Agents, as carriers of the practice of divestment "understand the world and themselves and use know-how and motivational knowledge, according to the particular practice" (Warde, 2005, p. 143). Why to divest an item and when to replace it, are moments in other practices that are carried out in accordance with what is appropriate and possible for a specific situation and setting.

### **6.1.3 Contextual elements in the divestment process**

Divestment practices differ from one country to another. Different contexts produce different outcomes because practitioners “invoke different kinds of shared worlds in which people encounter one another: different views of society and different ways of being in society” (Kemmis et al., 2014). Based on empirical data, it is suggested that a specific sociocultural context endorses specific ways of divestment.

The architectures of practice, as defined by Kemmis et al. (2014) are constituted according to specific conditions and arrangements. For divestment these two elements manifest as follows:

- **Material infrastructures.** The specific conditions in divestment practice refer to materials and infrastructures required for practicing divestment through different channels.
- **Cultural factors.** The contextual factors are relevant not only because of the geographical settings or the economic development of a region, but also because of the cultural elements that provide the settings for practitioners to enact consumption and divestment practices. The arrangements in divestment include the immaterial factors such as norms, values and specific rules attached to the practices of divestment.

These factors can facilitate or hinder specific divestment practices by making them more convenient and/or more accepted and thus more suitable than others. Culture becomes a fundamental element for understanding divestment since all practices are impregnated of cultural elements such as: rituals, routines, rules and their symbolisms (Spaargaren, 2013, p. 244). This study has also shown that the interaction of these two elements constitute the routine of divestment practice through a continuous process of negotiation.

### **6.1.4 Material agency. The type of product and its relationship with divestment practices**

Some proposals from the theories of practice have suggested that objects “exert a significant determining, and partially autonomous role in patterns of behaviour” (Warde et al., 2017, p. 29). When material goods are described as a means for constituting



changes (Glover, 2015, p. 128) through divestment processes, it is being assumed that material things have some agency. In this research, it is also proposed a contemporary approach to things in which the concept of material agency is incorporated into the Practice Theory. This concept aims to recognise how possessions can have an active role in the process of appropriation and divestment.

The findings of this research provide insights for arguing that not all divestment practices are identical in nature for all product types. Hence, different strategies must be encouraged in order to implement changes towards more sustainable ways of consumption. This study strengthens the idea that every type of material good would need a different strategy for sustainable divestment. This means that, according to the type of bond that the owner has established with the item, the process of divestment through the taxonomy will vary due to product type and the relationship between the product and the individual.

The results suggest that with some products such as mobile phones, the emotional attachment is barely existent, which means, the material aspects are more relevant. Monetary value in this case is the predominant concern because, while for sustainable divestment we need to recover this highly valued materials, the owners still keep them. Overall, the three different categories of products presented differences in their divestment processes. These findings therefore provide an insight into how the material conditions of the item predetermine to some extent the patterns of divestment.

## **6.2 Moments for intervention: facilitating the improvement of more sustainable ways of divestment**

The overall aim of the present study is recognising and characterising the elements of the divestment process in order to identify ways to contribute to sustainable consumption goals. Findings from the interviews illustrate that there cannot be a general rule for the process of divestment based on product design. The divestment process cannot be predicted as being the same irrespective of product, individual, culture and context, to such a point that possessions can reach different divestment points at different times for different reasons. Hence, the relationship between the owner and the possession are established at different levels. The taxonomy allows to identify how interventions for more sustainable ways of divestment can be carried out for each of the divestment categories:

- **Keeping and irregular use.** Participants reported experiences proving that items kept without being used or irregularly used can recover some value and return to a normal use stage. This can be accomplished by practices that restore or revitalise the item. They can involve repair activities, but there are also other mechanisms that can 'reactivate' the item. Social interactions are a space in which this can occur. For example, participants mentioned that being complemented about an item encouraged an extension of its lifespan; divestment was postponed. Hence, social interactions are important for adding value to items that were no longer considered as valuable. Use endorsement can also be gained through social interactions.

Another crucial point for this stage is relevant for items that are kept because they work as symbols for the owner. If the target is to recirculate the items, the emotional connection needs to be substituted through immaterial sources, in order to recover materiality and provide the owner with a reward that symbolises the emotional value of the item.

- **Virtual divestment.** When possessions are in the stage of virtual divestment, an important factor to consider is the creation of facilitators throughout the process. The development or enhancement of material infrastructures for providing adequate channels for divestment can improve the situation. However, when structural conditions are restraining sustainable ways of divestment, the alternative would be to increase the rewards that channels can provide in order to encourage sustainable ways of divestment. The physical and intellectual effort that is invested in the divestment process must be balanced by a benefit for the divestor. This implies a change in both the way the agential power is exerted (en-ablement) and in the institutions that should provide an adequate option for it.
- **Physical divestment.** This stage involves institutions and policies that are situated at the meso and macro level. The practitioner (consumer/divestor) is considered as a pivot for sustainable practices of divestment. However, once the physical divestment has passed to other agencies, the strategies should centre on facilitating new channels for exchanging goods and materials. This study has shown that the channels for divestment are not sufficient and sometimes not adequate. Hence, trusted organisations or institutions represent the most important agents for this process.

### **6.2.1 Towards a culturally-informed perspective of divestment process**

The previous section identified the moments when different strategies can be applied in order to promote more sustainable ways of consumption and divestment, including culturally independent and culturally dependent elements. Nevertheless, in order to promote more sustainable ways of divestment for any given society, this research provides elements to create a culturally-informed framework for sustainable divestment. The framework is centred on three main questions that need to be addressed.

#### **1) What are the accepted channels for divestment in that context?**

The findings of this research identified the preferred channels for divestment and the reasons why they are adopted by practitioners. Some channels for divestment are allowed in a community, regardless of their impact. Practices that are not accepted socially, will not be easily preferred by people. In a particular culture, specific ways of recirculating items tend to have a moral charge. Concepts like pride and shame when selecting a channel for divestment were found. It was observed that under this “morality in divestment”, practices of donation seem to be more accepted and hence they become normalised, which in turn makes them more common among members of a community. Examples like charitable institutions and donation to employees are cases of accepted channels for divestment. Since the inertia of a socio-historic condition is part of the current practices, it is important to identify these barriers before attempting to change the practice.

#### **2) Who should lead the initiatives for more sustainable divestment practices in a society?**

An important finding of the research is the relevance of institutions for the divestment dynamics. In any society there are institutions that are trusted by people and a socially accepted institution would be more successful when leading campaigns or actions for promoting sustainable divestment. It was observed that participants considered the

position of trusted institutions as part of their reward evaluation and of the selection of channels for divestment.

As an example of this, participants from Mexico demonstrated low trust towards governmental institutions, which could mean that any strategy ran by the government would not be received by citizens very well. This is linked to the divestment process in the sense that it is a factor to be aware of when deciding who should lead sustainability initiatives for divestment. The opposite case was observed in charitable institutions in the United Kingdom. A formally and long-established charitable organisation would be more accepted than a new, informal one.

### **3) How social relationships determine the preferred divestment channels?**

Any given society has different social dynamics. In the field of cross-cultural research, Hofstede (2001) suggested that cultural dimensions can provide information on how a particular society behaves. Dimensions such as collectivism-individualism, long-term/short-term orientation in a society would tell much about how people relate to each other. This dimension was less explored in the present study; however, through the preferred channels of each country it can be inferred that social links are fundamental for the activation of different channels for divestment. This activation has to consider how social relationships are established. The interviews provided evidence that Mexico and the United Kingdom socialise in different ways through the divestment practice. More person-to-person interactions were found in Mexico, whilst the United Kingdom had more person-institution-person recirculation modes. Although this characteristic is not determinative, it needs to be acknowledged to facilitate the interaction of channels and divestors.

## **6.3 Implications for design disciplines**

The thesis described the ways in which divestment can contribute to more sustainable ways of consumption. Features on products such as reliability, good performance, functionality and durability seem to be relevant for the consumer in the acquisition stage (Gnanapragasam et al., 2018) but, ironically, the taxonomy (section 5.3) has shown that these features do not play a major role when the items are divested. Following up

on this conclusion, the present study aimed to make contributions that were not centred on the features of the products.

This conclusion, however, also has strong implications for design because it implies that the scope of action for designers is limited and that the divestment process depends on factors that are outside the realm of design practice. Nonetheless, an evaluation of the possibility of contributing to sustainable consumption goals through the design disciplines was undertaken and the results are presented in this section.

Some authors in the field of design have considered the issues caused by the unsustainable patterns of consumption from different perspectives. However, the importance of lifestyles and other practices for consumption and divestment activities has been mostly overlooked (see section 2.4.1). It is for this reason that the present investigation aims to understand how these dynamics can work for the designers in order to improve the current situation. However, it is also recognised that design has the potential to transform material culture and promote specific dynamics.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the proposal here is to recognise design as an active agent for collaborating with change toward sustainable practices. From this perspective, not only the products would be subjects of change but also systems and services improved through design disciplines. If the setting or the context does not provide ways for sustainable divestment, the item can be divested in unsustainable ways. However, the enablement of practitioners can help to change the dynamics of divestment. The enablement of divestors can be assisted by design in different ways:

- Through the process of learning and knowledge delivery. When it comes to the propagation, repetition or the creation of routines for specific divestment activities, learning and enablement are a crucial element. In the social practice field, the en-ablement of participants means was described by Alkemeyer and Buschmann (2017) as the incorporation of “activity alongside passivity, adaptation and defiance, routine and reflexivity, which are all involved in the formation of play-ability”. The fact that a person is enabled to divest through sustainable channels is closely linked to the perceived reward.

Alkemeyer and Buschmann (2017) continue by explaining that learning and enabling the practitioner “is thus not pre-practically given but emerges in and across practices as a capacity to engage with the reality of practices by reproducing and transforming it” (p.22). Hence, any opportunity from

designers to integrate actively consumers (divestors) in the creation of sustainable channels for divestment, will increase the success of the strategies.

- **Connectivity.** The process of enablement of practitioners does not rely exclusively on individual changes. Connectivity through design can improve material and learning conditions of the context. In order to increase the possibilities for recirculation of items, design can get involved by identifying which platforms can be amplified and which others can be created.

Findings of the research demonstrated that information technologies have a great potential to increase this connectivity among members of the community and enhance their power. By increasing the possibilities for divestors, the chances for sustainable channels for divestment can also be increased. Through connectivity, infrastructures for recirculation can be modified, in order to increase their reach. Design has the tools to contribute to design these new infrastructures.

- **By providing an understanding of the culture.** The present investigation has provided a comprehensive description of how important the role of culture for any given practice is. It has also shown how deep-rooted dynamics for divestment represent a challenge if the aim is to transform them. Socio-historical conditions can make a channel more suitable than others. In this case, the participation of design is through gaining an understanding of these dynamics and take advantage when delivering an alternative way of doing things. The enablement of practitioners needs to start by knowing the dynamics of a society and evaluate the effectiveness that a new strategy can have. This results in more culturally-informed solutions.

Overall, these three fields need to be in constant interaction in order to reach the *enablement* of practitioners. Since each practitioner considers less or more able to practice divestment in a specific way, the fact that they are empowered by these three different routes increases the possibilities of promoting more sustainable ways for divestment.

### **6.3.1 The Transition Design Approach**

Recently, a new area of research in design has emerged as a response to the constantly changing environment that we are living in. Challenges such as climate change, resources depletion, waste generation and even inequality need to be addressed through different strategies (Resnick, 2019, p. 195). This approach is called “transition design” and it advocates for a design practice “within radically new socio-economic and political paradigm” (Irwin, 2015, p. 231). This paradigm also proposes a design-led societal transition toward more sustainable futures. To accomplish so, a transdisciplinary approach through design is proposed.

As observed, divestment practice is a layer in what seems to be a meta-problem that cannot be solved by the traditional knowledge of design disciplines. Longevity of material possessions, as observed, does not completely rely on durability, quality or any given material feature. Therefore, an approach that accounts for all the factors identified in this study is required in order to achieve more sustainable ways of consumption.

There are important similarities between the suggestions resulting from this study and exposed above (section 6.3) and the proposal of transition design (Irwin, 2015)

- New ways of designing. The transition to a sustainable society requires new approaches in design, informed by different value sets and knowledge.
- Transition designers have the skill, foresight and ability to connect different types of solutions.
- Social innovation through design has to work with other disciplines such as sociology to suggest more systemic solutions to problems. To promote more sustainable ways of divestment, as observed, also requires to develop culturally informed solutions, which demands inter and transdisciplinary work.

In general terms, the transition design framework would provide the background for implementing changes through design for more sustainable ways of divestment.

## **6.4 Limitations of the study**

Finally, this section presents the limitations of the research, in terms of methods used for data collection and their implications for the results and the conclusions of the study. Although practice theory achieved the objective of working as an approach to open up new possibilities for conceptualising social change (Shove, 2010, cited in Glover, 2016), some elements that were identified in empirical data have been only partially explained through the practice theory. Taxonomy of divestment identified moments in which the negotiation of value and waste becomes more an inner individual process linked to another dimension of the person. These moments can be further explored through different approaches.

The second limitation derives from the methods for data collection used in this study. Surveys and photo-elicitation interviews are self-declared methods. Hence, the results rely on the participants' declarations. Partly to overcome this limitation, a two-phase data collection was undertaken (section 3.3) to increase the validity of the results. Comparison of each participant's declarations from the two phases indicates a high degree of consistency, for example showing that a large percent of items are recirculated. However, some differences were also noticed, for example in the specific divestment channel chosen.

Another limitation is that studying divestment has also shed some light in other practices such as the acquisition of new items which were not explored as part of this research. Tangentially, this study found some connections among the moments of consumption: people who donate things also bin some items, people who donate also buy new things and buying new products is not necessarily linked to replacement. Hence, research on this topic would increase the understanding of the connections between divestment and other moments in consumption.

Finally, since the study was focused on the practice of divestment, the units of observation were not analysed in great detail. This had the advantage of allowing the construction of a divestment taxonomy and the understanding of divestment as a process instead of an activity because the units of observation have several similarities in their divestment process. However, differences in some stages of the divestment process were hard to capture due to the diversity of the selected goods.



## 6.5 Summary and final remarks

Throughout this chapter, the results of this study were reported and summarised. Findings were framed through an integrative approach that aimed to analyse the end-of-life of clothing, furniture and mobile phones under the sustainable consumption umbrella. By doing so, the implications of cultural context in the divestment practice were highlighted by studying the topic in two different countries: Mexico and the United Kingdom.

The aim of understanding consumption through the lens of divestment for contributing to sustainable consumption goals had the purpose of knowing how to prevent useful goods from being binned, and to be prepared for what is being inevitably binned; to discover appropriate ways of recirculation and to understand the role of owners and their willingness to do so, to analyse how the context is prepared (or not) for these changes and finally, to understand how a set of preconditions can support these suggestions.

The findings showed that the divestment is a complex and multi-layered process instead of a moment when objects are discarded, because of the intersections with other practices in daily life. The study showed that there are four elements that configure the practice of divestment: the setting, which refers to the physical and social space; the situational factors, which are the intersections with other practices in everyday life; the sociohistorical factors, that determine the immaterial prefigurations of the divestment practice; and finally, the material agency that is linked to the types of goods.

The countries that worked as cultural unites enabled to highlight how a culture can influence the divestment process. Although the four elements were present in both countries, differences were found in the channels people use to physically divest their possessions. Even though countries belong to different groups according to their income levels, no direct correlation was found in the divestment outcome apart from those related to the material infrastructures; for example, the recycling infrastructure is better set up in the United Kingdom making this option easier to choose for divestors, compared to Mexico where the recycling infrastructure is less developed.

Material infrastructures determine the amount of effort that people need to invest in order to physically divest their items, which can result in one channel more likely to being chosen than another. Nevertheless, cultural factors can also encourage divestors to choose or not a specific channel because of its degree of social acceptance. Some channels for divestment such as charities in the United Kingdom have positive

connotations, hence they are normally accepted. Other channels can be problematic, such as selling in the Mexican context, due to the association with affluence and social class. Another relevant factor that is part of the cultural component is the acceptance of specific institutions that manage the channels of divestment, which influences the more or less enthusiastic participation of people in sustainable ways of divestment.

According to the findings of this research, the individual factors seemed to be less relevant, in the sense that people with different levels of engagement in sustainable consumption practices (measured by the survey) enact the practice of divestment in similar ways. The negotiation of divestment outcomes seems to be a balance of intellectual and physical efforts that the owner needs to dedicate towards the physical divestment. Hence, more similarities in the selection of a channel can be found according the type of product or within the same country than among consumer profiles or individuals.

In conclusion, this study suggests that a culturally-informed perspective for promoting more sustainable ways for the divestment of durable goods is required to implement more successful strategies for changing behaviour. The lifespan of durable goods, at least in clothing, furniture and mobile phones can be jeopardised by factors that are extrinsic to the products. Finally, sustainable consumption discourses also need to open a space for other moments in the consumption spectrum since this study has shown that divestment practices are as much as important as the acquisition stage for more sustainable ways of consumption.

## **6.6 Further work**

This study aimed to investigate the divestment process and its elements in order to find ways to contribute to sustainable consumption goals. The limitations of the study also frame opportunities for future research. First, social practice theory perspective allowed to observe the connections between the different moments of consumption. It was observed how practitioners experience the divestment moment. However, in order to extend the knowledge, it would be important to analyse other actors in the divestment process. These actors could be agents involved in second-hand transactions such as charities or second-hand markets. By achieving a better understanding of connections among actors, a more robust theory of sustainable ways of divestment could be constructed.

Another opportunity for future research arises from the contextual analysis of sustainability and divestment. This research highlighted the role of the context for sustainable consumption. With the information obtained, it is evident that context is also important to measure the impact that any way of divestment can have. For example, waste management systems, recirculation channels, among others, can have different implications depending on the location. The same channel of divestment can have different environmental impact because linked processes might work differently in different places. This research was able to capture different channels for divestment and the social dynamics attached to them; however, it was not able to capture their precise environmental implications in further stages of the lifespan of durable goods.

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## Appendix A

### Questionnaire

Colour coding for survey analysis		
 Items for identifying Sociodemographic data	 Items to map participants' perceptions on sustainable and ethical consumption	 Items used to classify participants by profile

## Purchase Experiences

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### Page 1: Welcome!

#### Welcome!

Thank you for participating in this study. This research has the main purpose of understanding your purchase experiences and interactions between you and daily life products.

The questionnaire is divided in three parts: (1) demographic information, (2) personality, and (3) daily life.

The questionnaire should take less than 10 minutes to complete. I would like to assure you that all the information I collect will be kept in the strictest confidence and only used for research purposes.

There is no right or wrong answer to the questions. So, please answer the questions as honestly and accurately as possible. Please, if you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact the researcher *Ana Encino* by email at [sdagem@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:sdagem@leeds.ac.uk)

This project was ethically approved by the University of Leeds Ethics Committee (LTDESN-057)

Please remember:

- All of the information you provide will be treated as confidential and will be exclusively used for the research.
- Please answer the questions as honestly and accurately as possible

By clicking NEXT button below, you are giving your consent to proceed under the conditions outlined on this page.

**I understand and wish to continue**

## Page 2: Demographic Information

In this page you will find some questions about your demographic information.

Please remember, all you information will be treated as confidential.



1. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Not declared



2. What is your age?

- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75 or older
- Not declared



3. What is the highest level of school that you have completed?

- Secondary School
- High School
- College Degree
- Postgraduate Degree
- Not declared



4. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

- Student
- Part-time job
- Full-time job
- Self-employed
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Not declared

5. Have you furnished the place that you currently live in?

- Yes
- No



6. Where are you originally from?

- United Kingdom
- Europe (not UK)
- North America
- Latin America & The Caribbean
- Africa
- Asia
- Australia, New Zealand & Pacific Islands

### Page 3: Self/Personality

Please select the option that defines your personality better

7. I am a well-organised person

- Very true of me
- Somewhat true of me
- Somewhat untrue of me
- Very untrue of me

8. I am a self-controlled person

- Very true of me
- Somewhat true of me
- Somewhat untrue of me
- Very untrue of me

9. I evaluate every decision I take, before and after

- Very true of me
- Somewhat true of me
- Somewhat untrue of me
- Very untrue of me



10. I enjoy shopping for...

	Never	Rarely	Usually	Always
Clothing, footwear and personal accessories	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Furniture and appliances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technological devices (phone, laptop, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. For me, price is the most influential factor when buying something

Never                       Rarely                       Often  
 Always



12. After I buy something, I regret my decision

Never                       Rarely                       Often  
 Always



12.a. The last time I remember regretting a purchase, the reason was:

It was too expensive  
 It did not work as I expected  
 It did not look as I expected  
 It did not last as I expected  
 I realised I did not need it  
 Other

12.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:

## Page 4: Context & Daily Life

13. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with all the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Nowadays, environmental damage is so severe that there is very little individuals can do about it	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the UK, companies and industries are currently working very hard to make sure we have a clean environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consuming less is a way to improve environmental conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Technological solutions can completely solve environmental problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Price is the biggest restriction when buying something	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is better repair before replace	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. Please order by relevance these groups according to the possibility they have to solve current environmental problems. **(1 as the most relevant, 4 as the less)**

	1	2	3	4
Industries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individuals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Society in conjunction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>





18. What type of waste do you recycle? (include donations)

	Never	At least once a week	Once a month	Every six months	Once a year
Plastic	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Paper & Card	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Metals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Furniture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Electronic waste	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Page 6: Habits and Daily Life

Please select the option that describes you better



19. I am willing to pay premium for products that promise environmental or social benefits

	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Consumable goods (food, drinks, personal hygiene, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Utilities (gas, water, electricity)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Appliances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clothing and apparel	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Furniture	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal electronic devices (phone, laptop, etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



20. Before buying a product, I do consider rent or borrowing rather than purchasing it

Always                       Often                       Rarely  
 Never



21. When I buy something that I don't need, but I want it, I experience some kind of guilt

Always                       Often                       Rarely  
 Never



22. I advise my family, friends or colleagues to adopt pro-environmental behaviours (either in person or by other means)

- Always                       Often                       Rarely  
 Never



23. At this moment, I am extremely engaged with reducing my own environmental impact

- Yes                       No



23.a. If you said no, please select the sentence with which you feel more identified:

- I don't want to  
 I would like to but I don't know how  
 I would like to but I don't have time  
 I would like to but I don't have the money  
 I would like to but there is no available options nearby  
 Other

23.a.i. If you selected Other, please specify:

Please select as many options as you want



24. According to your opinion, sustainability can be achieved if \_\_\_\_\_ change(s)

- Government institutions  
 Society  
 Industrial sector  
 Individuals





27. For home furnishing

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Convenience (location, distributors)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Design (appearance)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Price	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brand	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental and social benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Performance & Functionality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Page 8: One last thing

Thank you for taking part of this survey. This questionnaire is the first part of the research project. The second stage involves inviting participants to take part in an brief interview. If you are willing to be considered for the second stage, please provide your e-mail address.

28. I will think about it, send me an e-mail with the details

29. I do want to participate in the prize draw (provide your e-mail)

## Appendix B

### Survey items for generating participants' scores

Type of Item				
AT	BI	B	E	S
Attitudes	Behavioural Intentions	Behaviours	Environmental	Social

Type of item and weight						
	AT	BI	B	E	S	ES
No items	6	7	9	9	3	10
Weight (%)	31	33.2	35.7	41	13.7	45.45

Type	Scale	Weight	Item
E	1-5	5.95	13.1. Nowadays, environmental damage is so severe that there is very little individuals can do about it
E	1-5	5.95	13.2. In the UK, companies and industries are currently working very hard to make sure we have a clean environment
E	1-5	5.95	13.3. Consuming less is a way to improve environmental conditions
E	1-5	5.95	13.4. Technological solutions can completely solve environmental problems
E	-2/2	2.38	13.6 It is better repair before replacing
E	1-5	5.95	15. When commuting to work, which type of transportation do you normally use?
E	-2/3	3.57	17. Indicate the frequency of your purchases of products with one or more of these characteristics Biodegradable
E	-2/3	3.57	Organic
S	-2/3	3.57	Locally sourced
S	-2/3	3.57	Fair trade
E/S	1-4	4.76	19. I am willing to pay premium for products that promise environmental or social benefits Consumable goods/
E/S	1-4	4.76	Utilities/
E/S	1-4	4.76	Appliances/
E/S	1-4	4.76	Clothing and apparel
E/S	1-4	4.76	Furniture
E/S	1-4	4.76	Personal electronic devices
E	1-4	4.76	20. Before buying a product, I do consider rent or borrowing rather than purchasing it
E/S	1-4	4.76	21. When I buy something that I don't need, but I want it, I experience some kind of guilt
S	1-4	4.76	22. I advise my family, friends or colleagues to adopt pro-environmental behaviours
E/S	1-3	3.57	25. When I am making my purchase decisions for clothing, I evaluate... Environmental and social benefits
E/S	1-3	3.57	26. When I am making my purchase decisions for personal electronic devices, I evaluate... Environmental and social benefits
E/S	1-3	3.57	27. When I am making my purchase decisions for furniture, I evaluate... Environmental and social benefits
	84		



## Appendix C

### Interview guidelines

<b>A. Clothing -new item-</b>
How long have you had this product? Did you buy it yourself?
How often do you wear it?
So far, how can you describe the cost-benefit relationship? Are you satisfied with the performance of the product?
When you purchased this piece of clothing, did you think a particular situation/event for wearing it?
Did you own a piece of clothing that was replaced by this one?
Can you remember the day that you decided to buy this product? Tell me a little bit about it
How many items of the same category (interchangeable) do you have?
When you acquired this product, did you think about the time it will last? Did you think about the replacement situation? If you had to replace this product tomorrow, what would be the things that you would like to change?
If you needed to get rid of it, how would you do it?

<b>B. Clothing -special item-</b>
How long have you had this product? Did you buy it yourself?
What is your favourite feature?
When you purchased the piece of clothing, did you think a particular situation/event for using it?
What makes this item special?
Can you remember some events in which you were wearing this item?
Is there any special episode or experience that you associate with this product?
Did you own a piece of clothing that was replaced by this one? Can you describe it for me?
Have you made any mends or changes to it?
Would it be any reason to get rid of it?
If so, how would you do it?
If you needed to get rid of it, how would you do it?

<b>C. Clothing -ready to be discarded-</b>
How long did you use this product? Did you buy it yourself?
Do you associate any particular moment of your life with this piece of clothing?
When did you decide to get rid of it?
Why did you decided to get rid of it?
Have you thought about how are you going to get rid of it?
Why?
Have you had second thoughts about getting rid of it?
Can you give me some examples of ways that you considered to get rid of it?
Why weren't they appropriate?
Have you bought something to replace this item?

<b>Systems for clothing divestment</b>
- Experiences when discarding clothing <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Channels</li><li>o Habits and routines (frequency, process, people involved)</li></ul>

<b>D. Furniture -new-</b>
How long have you had this product? Did you buy it yourself?
So far, how can you describe the cost-benefit relationship?
Are you satisfied with the performance of the product?
Did it fulfil its aim according to your expectations?
Can you describe the previous product that used to work as this one?
What happened to it?
Can you remember the day that you decided to buy this product? Tell me a little bit about it
Did you realise you needed it before buying it?
How do you think this piece fits in your lifestyle?
When you acquired this product, did you think about the time it will last?
If <b>so</b> , did you think about the replacement situation? Time, brands, model)
If you had to replace this product tomorrow, what would be the things that you would like to change?
If you needed to get rid of it, how would you do it?

<b>E. Furniture -special item-</b>
How long have you had this product? Did you buy it yourself?
What is your favourite feature?
When you purchased the item did you think a particular situation/event for using it?
Did it fulfil its aim according to your expectations?
What makes this item special?
What is the difference between this and other similar furniture that you own?
Can you remember the day that you decided to buy (or acquired) this product? Tell me a little bit about it -junctures-
Can you describe the previous product that used to fill in as this one? What happened to it?
Have you made any changes to the product?
Would it be any reason to get rid of it?
If so, how would you do it?

<b>F. Furniture -ready to be discarded-</b>
How long did you use this product?
Do you associate any particular moment of your life with this piece of furniture?
When did you decide to get rid of it?
Why did you decided to get rid of it?
How are you going to get rid of it?
Why?
Can you give me some examples of ways that you considered to get rid of it? Why weren't they appropriate?
Have you had second thoughts about getting rid of it?
Have you bought something to replace this item?

<b>Systems for furniture divestment</b>
- Experiences when discarding furniture: channels, moments, <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Channels</li><li>o Habits and routines (frequency, process, people involved)</li></ul>

<b>G. Mobile phone –current item-</b>
How long have you had this product? Did you buy it yourself?
What made you choose it?
Did you have a contract with a company? Do they offer any benefit for device's replacement?
Can you remember the day that you decided to buy (or acquired) this product?
Can you describe the phone that was replaced by this one? What happened to it?
When you purchased/acquired this product, did you think about the time it could last or any given replacement situation?

<b>Mobile phone –previous item-</b>
How long did you use this phone? Did you buy it yourself?
Can you remember the day that you decided to buy (or acquire) this product?
Can you describe the product that was replaced by this one? What happened to it?
When did you decide to get rid of it?
When you purchased/acquired this product, did you think about the time it could last?
How did you get rid of it? / How are you planning to get rid of it?

<b>Systems for mobile phones divestment</b>
- Experiences when discarding mobile phones <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Cases in which they have been kept</li><li>○ Cases in which they have been physically divested</li><li>○ Habits and routines (frequency, process, people involved)</li></ul>

<b>General questions (exploring divestment and circularity)</b>
- Do you remember a particular situation in which you were hesitating for a long time about keeping something or getting rid of it?
- Do you remember something that you regret to get rid of?
- Have you ever bought something from a second-hand shop? What type of items you can buy there or what others you would never buy in there?

## Appendix D

### Longitudinal questionnaire divestment channel



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**  
Ethical Approval No. PVAR 17-030

*Dear participant:*

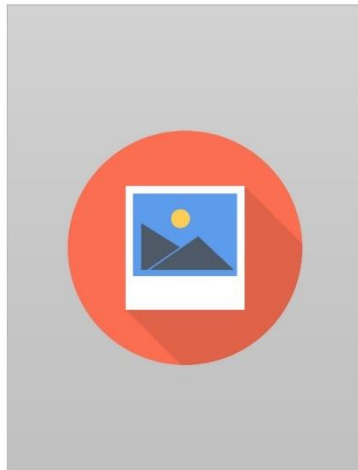
Thank you for taking part in the last stage of this research project. This stage is a short survey in which you will find some elements of the interview that we had a while ago. All your personal data will be treated with strict confidentiality. Please **thick the box** if you agree to take part and give consent to use data collected from this questionnaire.

I agree

#### **Instructions:**

In the following section you will see some of the pictures that you presented in the interview. At the time, these products were chosen because you had made the decision to get rid of them. Remember that there is no right or wrong answers. Please look at the image and answer the questions by selecting the most appropriate option.

#### **A) Piece of clothing**



#### **1. ¿What happened to this item?**

- I put it in the bin
- I gave it to a member of my family
- I gave it to a friend
- I sold it
- I took it to a recycling point
- I gave it to a charitable organisation  
*Specify: \_\_\_\_\_*
- I still have it
- Other (*specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

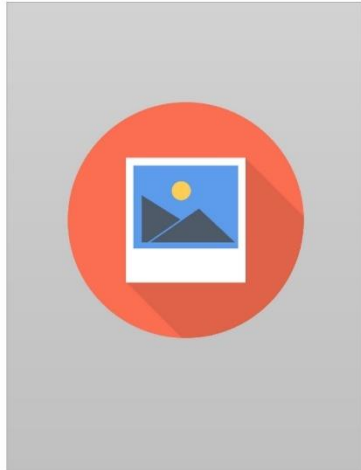
*(If you still have it, please proceed to the next section)*

#### **2. If you still have it, ¿which option describes your situation better?**

- I changed my mind, I still use it
- It is still good conditions and:**
- I am giving it away but haven't had time to deliver it
  - I am giving it away but haven't found someone that wants it.
  - I am giving it away but I am collecting more stuff
  - I am going to sell it but haven't found a buyer
- It is not in good conditions and:**
- I am reusing some of the parts
  - I haven't found a collection point for it
  - I don't know how to get rid of it
- Other (*specify*): \_\_\_\_\_**



**B) Piece of furniture**



**3. ¿What happened to this item?**

- It went in the bin
- I gave it to a member of my family
- I gave it to a friend
- I sold it
- I took it to a recycling point
- I gave it to a charitable organisation  
*Specify:* \_\_\_\_
- I still have it
- Other (*specify*): \_\_\_\_

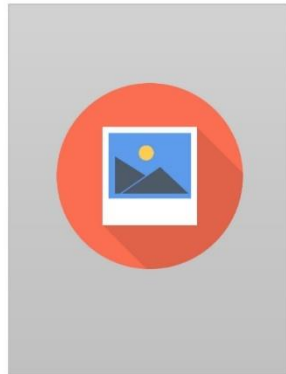
*(If you still have it, please proceed to the next section)*

**4. If you still have it, ¿which option describes your situation better?**

- I changed my mind, I still use it
- It is in good conditions and:**
- I am giving it away but haven't had time to deliver it
  - I am giving it away but haven't found someone that wants it.
  - I am giving it away but I am collecting more stuff
  - I am going to sell it but haven't found a buyer
- It is not in good conditions and:**
- I am reusing some of the parts
  - I haven't found a collection point for it
  - I don't know how to get rid of it
- Other (*specify*):** \_\_\_\_



**C) Mobile phone**



**5. Have you got rid of this item?**

- YES
- NO

*If you said YES, please proceed to question 6  
if you said NO, please proceed to question 7*

**6. How did you get rid of this item?**

- I put it in the bin
- I gave it to a member of my family
- I gave it to a friend
- I sold it
- I took it to a recycling point
- I gave it to a charitable organisation

*Specify: \_\_\_\_*

- Other (*specify*): \_\_\_\_

**7. If you still have it, which option describes your situation better?**

- Still in use
- I have some important data that I need to copy
- I am going to sell it but haven't found a buyer
- I haven't found a collection point for it
- I'm going to recycle it but I haven't had time to take it
- I don't know how to get rid of it
- I'm scared about someone extracting stored data
- Other (*specify*): \_\_\_\_

**Thank you for taking part in this study!**

*For further questions please contact the researcher:*

sdagem@leeds.ac.uk

## Appendix E

### Participants' information sheet

#### ***First things first***

You are being invited to take part in the research project: *Design as need satisfier agent. A biocultural approach*. Before you decide whether if you want to participate or not, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

*Thank you for thinking about taking part in this project!*

#### ***What is the project about?***

Each product has a lifecycle: it is produced, sold, bought, used and discarded. The aim of this research is understanding how interactions between users and context occur to create a product's life story.

From we wake up, until we go to sleep, we interact with hundreds of objects every day. Design has the aim to anticipate all these interactions to improve user-products experiences. Not only by making objects more pleasant for the user but more coherent with our environment.

Therefore, this project is about tracking product's life cycle, their performance and users' experiences around them to find opportunities for improving daily life through design.

#### ***The outcomes of the research***

Since this is a relatively new topic, this research will help to find some interesting insights about lifespan of products. It is hoped that this work will lead us to a greater understanding about people experiences with products and how to improve them.

#### ***Why have I been chosen?***

You have been invited to take part of this project because your profile fits with the main characteristics of participants that are required for the research. However, it is your decision if you want to participate or not and if you change your mind you can stop taking part at any time until January 2018. You don't have to explain why if you want to stop participating.



### ***What about my personal information?***

You will not be identified in the research and your quotes will be anonymised, that means real names will not be used in any reports or publications. All data will be securely stored and your personal information will be anonymised.

### ***What do I have to do?***

Since this project is related with daily life products, three categories have been selected: home furnishing, clothes, and mobile phones. First, you will participate by:

- Answering a questionnaire (it can be answered online, this will take about 15 minutes)  
Then, if you want to be part of the next stage, you will contribute by:
- Taking some pictures of belongings that you choose. Then, we will use those images to talk about your experiences with them (about 60 minutes) preferably at your place, if that is not possible, you can choose the place that suits you better.
- Finally, you can decide if you want to be part of a chat group about the same topics (about 2 hours).

### ***Will I be recorded?***

I will use a voice recorder to record our meeting and. Recording our meetings means I won't be distracted by trying to write or remember what you have said. The recording will be exclusively used to help me to write up what we talked about. No one else will have access to them. I will keep the recording stored using a password and they will be deleted at the end of my project.

### ***How the results of the research will be used?***

The results may be published in a dissertation and/or conference papers. Still, your personal information will remain anonymous. No other use will be made of them without your written permission.

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and the signed consent form to keep.

This project was ethically approved by the University of Leeds Ethics Committee (LTDESN-057)


***Thank you for thinking about taking part in this project!***

Contact details: Ana Encino / School of Design / sdagem@leeds.ac.uk



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

## Appendix F Participants' consent form

School of Design / Faculty of Visual Arts and Communications		 <b>UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS</b>	
<b>Consent to take part in “Design as a Needs Satisfier Agent, a Biocultural Approach” Project</b>			
			Add your initials next to the statements you agree with
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 18 <sup>th</sup> of October 2016 explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.			
I agree for the data collected from me to be stored and used in relevant future research.			
I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from the University of Leeds or from regulatory authorities where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.			
I agree to take part in the above research project and will inform the lead researcher should my contact details change.			
Name of participant			
Participant's signature			
Date			
Name of lead researcher	ANA G. ENCINO		
Signature			
Date*			
<p>*To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant.</p> <p>Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form, the letter/ pre-written script/ information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated consent form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.</p>			
<i>Project title</i>	<i>Document type</i>	<i>Version #</i>	<i>Date</i>
Design as a Needs Satisfier Agent, a biocultural Approach	Consent form for collecting data	1	18.10.16

## Appendix G

Intention vs actual divestment channel by participant and type of product

Part. ID								
Neil		●		●		○ ●		
Sofia			● ● ●		○ ●			
Peter	●	● ●		○		○		
Tom	○ ●		● ●					
Daniel			● ●		● ●			
Jane			●		●	●		
Lesley			●		●	● ●		
Matt	○	●	●	●		○		
Oliver			●		●		● ●	
Ema		●	●		○		● ●	
José	○	●	●	●				
Jacob	○		● ●			●	○	
Sarah				●	●	●		
Paula			●		●	●		○ ●
Katie	●		●	○		●		○
Leo					●		●	●
Mateo			● ○		●		●	○
Victoria						●	● ●	○
John		●	● ●	○ ●				
Hannah	○		● ● ●	●		○		
David	○	●	●	●				○
Luis					● ● ●			○ ●
Richard	○ ● ●		●			●		
Mara			● ●		○	●	○	
Ted	●	○		● ●				
Louise		●		●				○ ●
Teo			●					● ●
Hélène		●	○			● ●		
Amy	●			●		●		
Julia	○		● ●		●		○	

Codes	○	Planned for clothing	●	Actual for clothing		Binning		Giving to family and friends		Giving to employees		Mexico
	○	Planned for furniture	●	Actual for furniture		Keeping		Donating to charity		Giving away (unspecified)		United Kingdom
	○	Planned for phone	●	Actual for phone		Recycling		Selling				
Profiles		Authentic Greener		Moderate Greener		Pragmatic		Detached				