

## SECOND-HAND CLOTHES SHOPS IN SLOVENIA: THE CONTEMPORARY SITUATION IN ITS (A)HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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*This article contradicts Slovenian public opinion that asserts there is no tradition of second-hand clothes stores in Slovenia. It briefly demonstrates that second-hand retail clothing has a long history in the country that was interrupted for a few decades following the 1960s. In addition, the article reflects upon the question of why “socialist mentality” or more precisely, a “specifically Slovenian socialist mentality” is publicly perceived as the main reason for the contemporary lack of such a retail sector. According to the author, it is not unimportant that such mentality is most often ascribed to marginal and lower social strata who supposedly link second-hand clothes with poverty, thus sustaining their premodern (“socialist”) notions. However, public perceptions of the modernization process can only primarily hide contemporary social differences.*

**Keywords:** *second-hand clothing, retail, Slovenia, post-socialism, modernization*

### INTRODUCTION

As a child, I often received various pieces of used clothing from relatives and acquaintances. I gladly wore those items, as they often provided me with an enhanced element of choice in my wardrobe. In the 1980s and 1990s, during my high school and study years, the number of such donations decreased. With my own children I have become involved in a few social network through which used children’s clothes circulate. When I also started to buy second-hand clothes, shoes and accessories,<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By using the expression clothes (or clothing), I refer to its wider meaning of clothes, shoes and accessories.

both for my children and myself, I began comparing their public availability in Slovenia and abroad, therein coming across public opinion estimating that there are only a few such second-hand stores in Slovenia. My own “alternative consumerist experience” (Gregson and Crewe 2003:1; cf. Fajt 2014:147; Stobart and Van Damme 2010:7) and the (un)lucky coincidence of noticing a lack of second-hand shops in Slovenia thus led me to this research interest (Sunier et al. 2005:107).<sup>2</sup>

I noticed that a Slovenian public discourse generally considers the use of and trading in second-hand clothing in contemporary Slovenia as a novelty, something with no tradition that is supposedly a consequence of the specific Slovenian “socialist mentality”. Therefore I became interested in historical evidence surrounding the use of and trading in second-hand clothing alongside wondering why various media and individuals acting as contemporary opinion leaders<sup>3</sup> explain the scarcity in terms of “socialist mentality”. This article therefore seeks to prove that second-hand retail clothing has existed in the country, and describe how it started to vanish from the 1960s onwards. Despite its recent reappearance, I claim that such shops can only be perceived as a novelty and as a new type of retail if they specialize in selling mostly ordinary, unstylish garments. If the article’s first objective is to briefly present the deficiency in public opinion concerning the lack of a tradition of second-hand clothes shops in Slovenia, the second is to reflect upon why “socialist mentality” or more precisely, a “specifically Slovenian socialist mentality” is publicly presented as the main reason for this lack. As the anthropological literature on post-socialism suggests, “socialist mentality” is nowadays most often ascribed to the marginal and lower social strata, who are viewed as the losers of the (post-socialist) transition, incapable of adjusting themselves to the new situation (cf.

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<sup>2</sup> This article therefore also results from my occasional personal observations and consumerist experiences over the last ten years, making use of “hanging out” as a research method (cf. Woodward 2007; Miller and Woodward 2011).

<sup>3</sup> This is also the reason why my research at this phase has not included oral sources offering personal insights into the history or contemporaneity of the situation relating to second-hand clothes shops.

Buchowski 2006). As became apparent, this can also be applied to various public discourses on the lack of second-hand shops in Slovenia that use a discourse of modernization to hide contemporary social differences.

This article is structured chronologically: brief insights into the historical situation regarding the use of and retail in second-hand clothing (for adults) in Slovenia is followed by sections describing the situation up until (late) socialism and the present moment. In the conclusion these are compared with a general history of second-hand clothes retail. Special attention is given to the socio-cultural context of the second half of the twentieth century and to various historical notions of the modernization processes through which contemporary public perceptions and opinions regarding the lack of second-hand clothes shops in Slovenia are observed.

The historical overview is based mostly on data found in the literature on clothing, as well as on certain normative and archival sources (gazettes, meeting records and bulletins), while reflections on the contemporary situation are added from the perspective of the anthropology of post-socialism. The outline of the contemporary situation, and of public impressions and opinions, relies on printed and web media reports<sup>4</sup> – however I have not systematically analyzed any specific Slovenian newspaper or magazine. I have conducted a keywords search in various web browsers and in the virtual library or bibliographic system of Slovenia (*Cobiss*), in order to find as much varied media material on the topic as possible. As was apparent, the main Slovenian daily newspapers (*Delo*, *Dnevnik*, *Večer*, *Finance*), their supplements (*Objektiv*, *Bonbon*, *Moje finance*), certain regional journals (*Gorenjski glas*, *Dolenjski list*) and online news sites (*Žurnal24.si*, *Svet24*, *Siol.net*) have been reporting on the topic, all with either a focus on economic, financial or trend-setting interpretations of second-hand clothes retail in Slovenia and abroad. I also considered some feedback on the published articles and a (computer) blog where a few opinions on such retail in contemporary Slovenia were posted.

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<sup>4</sup> I focused exclusively on the offline, commercially profitable (consignment or not) sale of used clothing for adults. I left out personal and institutional exchanges of second-hand clothing and its donations, and I also did not focus on flea markets and online trading.

## **THE HISTORY OF THE USE OF AND TRADING IN SECOND-HAND CLOTHING IN SLOVENIA**

A long history of wearing and trading in second-hand clothing can be traced when reviewing the basic literature on the history of clothing in Slovenia. As a part of family inheritance, clothing was often passed on across the generations (see for example Baš 1987:93; Makarovič and Dolenc 1995:56; Žagar 1984:54). This was particularly common with expensive items, such as coats, furs, uniforms and costumes for special occasions baptizing outfits for newly born children, communion and confirmation clothing, as well as for wedding dresses. Sources report that as early as in the 1840s, in two parts of Slovenia (Dravsko polje and Kranjska [Carniola]) blue coats were inherited. Due to the poor economic situation of the population, these were usually the common property of all the relatives and were sometimes even used by three generations. Similarly, grandchildren in the area surrounding Trieste inherited valuable hats made from beavers' fur, while women in the area around Ljubljana inherited special coverings called *avba* (Baš 1987:192, 220).

As a literary excerpt from the novella “Rags of the Dead People” illustrates, exchanging second-hand clothing was still common in the second half of the twentieth century, while the novella’s author gradually rejected the practice, due to the wars and his attitude towards death:

“I was wearing my friend’s shirt and for the trousers and jacket I’m also no longer sure whom they belonged to. Sometimes we exchanged clothing like that – if you liked something, you exchanged it [...] Therefore, I was perhaps already obsessed with other people’s clothing, although later on people started to force used garments of the deceased upon me. Then I really rebelled [...] My mother said she had some shirts, shoes and other clothing, which she forced me to pack into my suitcase [...] ‘But had these things belonged to someone who was already deceased?’ I asked [...] ‘It doesn’t matter. They’re a quality trademark and durable; you will be able to wear them for a couple of years.’ Then she said her uncles and aunts kept bringing her sweaters, pants etc. They were used to them from their youth, as they were a family of seven siblings. They had all been wearing clothes one after another since they were walking with their little bare feet across their sandy yard [...] We no longer exchange clothing

as we used to, since we throw rags into dust bins” (Zorec 2011:75, 77, 78, 84).<sup>5</sup>

Women’s and children’s clothing in particular, as well as clothes made from lighter fabrics, were also commonly reused (Tomažič 1983:13). For example, in the period between the two World Wars, children from workers’ families in Ljubljana would wear hand-me-down clothing from their older siblings, who in turn wore the second-hand (resewn) clothing of their parents. Families could save money by owning a suitable sewing machine, as housewives usually knew how to use them. Following the advice of more experienced women and (fashion) magazines, women were not only skilled in sewing, but also in dyeing faded clothes, as well as knitting socks and new jackets from old ones, and making other alterations. In addition, tailors and dressmakers knew how to turn over faded and worn-out fabrics – for example heavier (and more expensive) cloth for a coat – and how to make new clothes out of the inner side of a cloth (*ibid.*:14).<sup>6</sup> Alterations that had been known since at least the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Baš 1992:110) came into wider use in times of economic crisis and were typical up until the 1960s (Žagar 2011:185). Later on, knowledge of such practices was lost and it was particularly “forgotten when confectionery products became widespread” (Tomažič 1983:14).<sup>7</sup>

However, used clothes were not only inherited, exchanged and reused, they were also a part of trade, and especially in periods of scarcity many individuals traded illegally in them. Clothing was an (alternative) means of payment and people often exchanged clothes for food. For example, the poorer inhabitants of Tržič, a small town in the north of

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<sup>5</sup> All translations from Slovene literature and sources are the author's own.

<sup>6</sup> If clothes were sewn from stronger fabrics such as cloth, they were already initially designed for alterations and turning over (cf. Žagar 1984:122–123, 126; 2011:185; on the repurposing of wares at the turn of the nineteenth century in the USA cf. Le Zotte 2013:192).

<sup>7</sup> Since “the field of socialist fashion” was based on “tactical imitation, especially when using cheap materials and home sewing was considered”, due to the “socialist economic ethos”, people continued remaking clothes by themselves in large numbers in the seventies and eighties of the previous century as well (Pušnik 2014:173).

Slovenia, exchanged their used yet well-preserved clothing for poultry, which in the period before the Second World War was mostly sold there by Croats: “Reportedly, there was so much old clothing packed in a variety of boxes and gathered in Tržič that an entire cattle wagon was filled with them” (Hiršel 2006:64). During the Second World War, clothing and footwear were regularly taken from deceased soldiers (see for example Ferenc et al. 1963:168), while bartering or “berija” with second-hand clothing also took place in the Zasavje region after the war. The clothing of people killed or missing in war was exchanged for food, while there were special (mostly female) brokers or intermediaries, who recorded needs and collected orders of clothing in the countryside, exchanging it for food that they took to towns (Mlakar 2004:41–42). Post-war shortages that caused such bartering further led people to “rob” the deceased by taking off their clothes and selling them, as recorded in the literature as well (Gartner 2015:31).<sup>8</sup>

However, since at least the first half of the nineteenth century, used clothing was also a part of the official and legal retail sector: “the mostly poorer population appropriated the clothing fashions of towns by also buying worn-out clothes in antique shops” (Baš 1987:58).<sup>9</sup> In around 1848, the antique shop in Ljubljana was mentioned by the novelist Josip Jurčič, who wrote about how people from the suburbs bought clothes there. According to him, second-hand clothes could often not be distinguished from new clothes, since it was hard to estimate whether clothes “were sewed anew by the tailors or bought among other used stuff in the antique shops” (ibid.:67). At approximately the same time, in the middle of the nineteenth century, many students of rural Slovenian origins also obtained used, but well-preserved and affordable clothing at the Vienna antique

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<sup>8</sup> For example, a gravedigger from one smaller northern Slovenian town took clothes off of the deceased right after the funeral: he dug out the grave, took off the suit of the deceased, took it to cleaners and afterwards to the commission shop where he wished to sell it: “before the gravedigger buried the coffin, he undressed the deceased and sold his clothing” (Gartner 2015:31).

<sup>9</sup> Two sources from the afore-mentioned period refer to the area around the second largest Slovenian town today, Maribor: one is from 1808 and it mentions a farmer wearing a worn-out overcoat of an old townsman, while the other is from 1814, and is about day labourers and domestic helpers, who “often bought long trousers” in the town’s antique shops (Baš 1987:58).

market (*ibid.*:222), while in the Craftsmen's Order from 1859, which abolished the last remnants of the guild and separated the free from the non-free crafts, trading in used clothing, linen, iron or pawn-shops was ranked as a non-free craft (Pančur 1999:34–35). In 1884 there were six shops in Ljubljana selling new clothes, and fifteen antique shops (Tomažič 1983:14). Here, poorer rural dwellers as well as rural peddlars and lower strata from suburban and urban areas would still buy clothes (Baš 1987:60, 62), and thus at least partially introduce urban fashion to rural areas. In the first half of the twentieth century, in 1922, “shops with a variety of used clothing (goods) (antiques)” were mentioned in the insurance rankings (Naredba 1922:588), while at the beginning of the Second World War, instructions for the rationalized sale of “fabrics, garments and footwear” were published due to shortages in the Ljubljana region. According to those instructions, certain clothing and footwear could only be bought by presenting so-called identity cards or special permits. However, this was not true in the case of used clothes, since “used clothing was excluded from this rule, if sold by companies with public authorization for such trading” (Navodila 1942:651).

## **SECOND-HAND CLOTHES SHOPS UP UNTIL THE (LATE)SOCIALIST PERIOD**

During the first decades after the Second World War, used garments could mostly be obtained in the so-called commission shops: “At first, people only bought worn and used clothing, then later clothing from American humanitarian packages, while clothes from Trieste were the last to arrive on the shelves” (Tomažič 1983:14; cf. Habinc 2017). Similar to contemporary consignment stores, which sell used but well-preserved garments from previous seasons, the (Yugoslav) commission shops of the second half of the twentieth century sold goods for a small provision, however with state approval from the 1960s they sold “mainly smuggled Western goods” (Studen Petrović 2010:529; cf. Han 2013:6 and Panić 2014:64). Over time these luxury and desired (new) goods mostly replaced used garments, and in the 1980s the commission based retail of old clothes had become “virtually unknown, or at least very rare,” although it was previously “very frequent” (Tomažič 1983:14; cf. Žagar 2011:185).

As the literature and sources indicate, the 1960s and 1970s – the period in which socialist consumerism developed – was also the time when the economic and material situation improved in Yugoslavia (cf. Duda 2005, 2010). It was also the time when “a general opinion” appeared implying “that collecting used clothing and footwear is no longer necessary in Slovenia, since we’re rich enough” (29. seja 1966:348). Supported by the socialist ideology that promoted an egalitarian society with no class divisions and no poverty, it was supposed that anybody could obtain new clothing, while collecting used garments became an activity in which predominantly humanitarian organizations engaged (ibid.:348).<sup>10</sup> Socialist consumerism supported by the idea of socialist modernization therefore spread the value, or even the cult of the new, and equalized the use of and sale in second-hand clothing with the poverty of the pre-socialist past, as well as with pre-modernity. While I am aware of scholarly criticism of the concept of social networks as an essential means within socialist economies of shortage (see for example Thelen 2011), these networks nevertheless played an important role in hiding the material incapacities of individuals as well as of socialist consumerism as a whole. For example, used garments never stopped circulating through private social networks. It became ideologically and morally less acceptable to sell used clothing for personal profit, rather than donating it or passing it along one’s social networks. During late socialism, predominantly buying used clothing became proclaimed and perceived as a sign of (pre-socialist) poverty as well as of pre-modernity. The garments sold in the commission shops of the first decades after the Second World War were namely mostly practical, everyday and ordinary, of those that were accessible (cf. Habinc 2017). Compared with the items sold in the pre-war antique shops or at the flea markets, they were not items through which individuals tried to become ‘modern’ and place themselves higher on a social scale. When the post-war period of scarcity ended, commission shop garments therefore came to be perceived as not only old and used, but additionally as premodern. This is also one of the reasons why commission shops simultaneously transformed into “hard currency shops” – a topic beyond the scope of this paper (cf. ibid.).

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<sup>10</sup> The Main Committee of the Red Cross of Slovenia in 1965 was, for example, considering organizing several warehouses for the depositing of used clothing, shoes and blankets (Osem ton 1977:1).



## CONTEMPORARY SHOPS SELLING SECOND-HAND CLOTHING IN SLOVENIA

Turning now to the contemporary situation regarding second-hand clothes shops in Slovenia, it is important to know that as a member of the European Union since 2004, Slovenia is expected to follow directives on reducing the disposal of textile waste. However, a recent survey conducted by the Natural Sciences Faculty revealed that disposing of such waste is still a predominant practice. Some Slovenian waste disposal centres separate textile from other waste,<sup>11</sup> and used clothes can also be donated to humanitarian organizations (e.g. Red Cross and Caritas). From 2002, used clothing can also be left in Humana's containers,<sup>12</sup> while textiles are also occasionally collected by some primary schools and then handed over to private enterprises that sort through them and sell them on (Žurga and Forte Tavčer 2014:48). Statistically on average each Slovenian citizen annually disposes of fourteen kilograms of used clothing (Milič 2012:16), although "Slovenians usually pass on clothes they no longer wear" (Omerzi 2010:35). They usually pass them over to friends and relatives, while the containers are considered the most convenient means for the public collection of used clothing (Žurga and Forte Tavčer 2013:15; cf. Božičko 2012a, 2012b; Jelovčan 2003; Pungercar 2012; Omerzi 2010 and Žagar 2011).<sup>13</sup>

As the presented data indicates, it is very rare for used clothing to begin to circulate commercially and for profit in Slovenia. Yet, as most of the media reports emphasize, imported used garments are also sold very rarely

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<sup>11</sup> In 2011, waste disposal centres in Slovenia collected 662 tons of textile waste and 315 tons of garments (Žurga and Forte Tavčer 2014:49). Nevertheless, textile waste was only personally handed over by a minority of Slovenes: in 2013, 76% of consumers did not bring any item of clothing to the waste disposal centres, while 87% of consumers did not cast away any textiles (Žurga and Forte Tavčer 2014:52).

<sup>12</sup> When Humana Slovenia started to operate in 2002, some criticized it for exporting and selling garments collected in Slovenia (Humana; cf. Rosc 2014; on comparable reactions people had in the USA when humanitarian organizations started to sell donations at the beginning of the twentieth century, see Le Zotte 2013:180).

<sup>13</sup> Since there is no organized system of handing over textile waste, and no enterprise in Slovenia which would take care of the sorting and further handling, processing or marketing of the textile waste, together with other mixed waste it is still a large ecological and financial burden (Žurga and Forte Tavčer 2014:44).

in Slovenian stores. Some researchers state this as being part of a difference between northern and western Europe on the one hand, where used clothing supposedly more frequently circulates commercially, and southern Europe on the other hand, where people are said to be more accustomed to donating used clothing to humanitarian organizations (Omerzi 2010:9; cf. Marzella 2015:106, 119). Nevertheless, the majority of the literature, as well as some newspapers, further point out that at least in some post-socialist countries in southern parts of Europe, such as for example Bulgaria and Croatia, the mass consumption of second-hand clothing is a recent phenomenon. Global growth within the second-hand retail clothing market is often presented as a consequence of economic liberalization in third-world countries, while it is also caused by increasing demand in the former socialist countries (Tranberg Hansen 2004:3; cf. Appelgren and Bohlin 2015a:4, 2015b:145; Jens 2010:174; Marzella 2015:110; McRobbie 1997:134, 136; Reuters 2014). Bearing in mind that Slovenia is a former socialist country, many journalists nevertheless established that trading in second-hand clothes in contemporary Slovenia is underdeveloped and, as will be further presented, they have also asked why – from a productivistic point of view (Luthar 2002:251) – such trading has not blossomed at least from 2008 onwards, when the country has been in recession. Stores selling second-hand clothing for adults were said to be very scarce, for example it was stated that: “We have only found five of them!” (Bratanič 2014:14; cf. Škerjanc 2011a) and “although the purchasing power of Slovenians decreased during the economic crisis, this had no significant effect on trading in second-hand goods, since we still speak of less than one percent of the whole market” (Bratanič 2014:28).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> According to the Eurostat data for 2008, 0.84 % of all authorized commercial enterprises in the EU were engaged in the selling of second-hand goods, while in Slovenia it was 0.15% of all enterprises. In 2011, this percentage grew by 0.04% (to 0.19%) in Slovenia, while in the EU it grew by 0.16% (to 1% of all enterprises). However, a rapid growth was only noticed when online individual trading was observed: in 2012 on [www.bolha.com](http://www.bolha.com), the Slovenian online marketplace of (mostly) used things, 25% more adverts were on offer compared with the previous year. 70% of all adverts were published by individuals while, when compared with 2011, there were 34% more adverts for used clothing and footwear (Bratanič 2014:28; cf. Milič 2012:16).

As can be reconstructed from the media reports, the recent history of second-hand clothes shops for adults in Slovenia began when the first such shop opened in 1997 in Ljubljana's largest shopping centre on the outskirts of the city (Ovsenik 2011). A few years later other second-hand shops also appeared in the city centre, operating for a few years. One of them sold maternity clothing and clothing for older women, while the research revealed that another focused on second-hand luxury clothing (Krušič 2005:44–45). According to the sellers, at that time the majority of customers were "people from the middle class, including a large number of nurses and teachers", while poorer strata, such as the Roma minority, the elderly and students, were also common.<sup>15</sup> In Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana, there are currently seven shops selling second-hand clothing in the city. One is a private boutique, located in the city centre, that only sells exclusive vintage clothing that has been purchased abroad. Another is a consignment store, also located in the city centre. It is similarly privately owned and sells second-hand luxury clothing sourced from the local population. The third shop is located in the old town and sells vintage clothes as well as "clothes without stylistic peculiarities" (Fajt 2014:158)<sup>16</sup> that have been obtained abroad. The only second-hand shop that does not advertise itself by emphasizing vintage clothes or via exhibiting refurbished wares or jewellery, art works, fashion shoes etc.<sup>17</sup> opened in Ljubljana at the

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<sup>15</sup> However, not all products on offer were equally desirable – for example customers rarely bought underwear and shoes: "Slovenes would not take them, even if they were for free". Nevertheless, sweaters, skirts, trousers, winter jackets and in the summer shirts were often asked for (Recek 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Used clothing is "usually divided into two categories: vintage clothing and common used clothing". The first category denotes pieces from different periods of the twentieth century, while the second includes clothing without stylistic peculiarities, usually collected from various waste disposal centres, or bought from closed boutiques or factories. On the distinction between second-hand and vintage clothing, see cf. Cervellon et al. 2012:957–958; Downing Peters 2014:219, 235; Jenss 2010:171, 173.

<sup>17</sup> Škerjanc 2011a:19 explains: "The contemporary concept of second-hand stores must offer more than just a social aspect – it must attract customers through its sustainable use, ecology, individuality and uniqueness" (cf. Fredriksson 2013:204–207; for a comparison with similar marketing strategies already present in the first half of the twentieth century in the USA, see Le Zotte 2013:193).

beginning of 2015. It is a part of the international Textile House for Euro Trade s.r.o. enterprise, operating mostly in (south)eastern Europe (Textile House 2017),<sup>18</sup> and nowadays it mostly sells clothes gathered by Humana and obtained abroad.<sup>19</sup> Further from the city centre, Ljubljana's Re-use Centre can also be found, and similarly, it sells vintage as well as clothing "without stylistic peculiarities" (Fajt 2014:158), but only sourced from the local population. On the outskirts of the city there are currently two more second-hand shops. One is located in the biggest shopping mall at the exact same location as the first Slovenian second-hand shop with clothing, while the other is in another mall. Both of them sell mostly second-hand garments obtained abroad, while the second one also donates a small percentage of the profits from each purchase to Ljubljana's dog shelter (Eqoos 2017).

According to the literature, four main types of trading in second-hand clothing are known to be present in contemporary Slovenia: the oldest are believed to be the flea markets, and following those, there are vintage shops, vintage fairs and online offers. Funnily enough, the above mentioned classification of trading in second-hand clothing, made by a native researcher (Munda 2014:67),<sup>20</sup> does not even mention second-hand shops which mostly sell non-stylistic second-hand clothing (Fajt 2014:158).

According to the owners of several of these shops, the economic crisis has supposedly not influenced people's demand for second-hand clothes. Buying clothing in second-hand stores remains a marginal consumption practice with no effect on mass consumption (Applegren and Bohlin 2015a:4). Nevertheless, some changes were caused by a growing ecological awareness, and an oversaturation with mass brands. As the owners explained, a wish for individualized expression has become stronger, and people have started to buy vintage or used clothing pertaining to peculiar brands that they otherwise would not have been able to afford (N. G. 2013),

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<sup>18</sup> It opened its first stores in Slovenia in 2011 – however not in Ljubljana, but in the second largest Slovenian town Maribor, and in a smaller town close to it, Ptuj, where the economic situation is worse than in the capital (Škerjanc 2011b:18).

<sup>19</sup> However, customers can only be informed about this if they directly ask the merchants about the origin of the garments.

<sup>20</sup> On types of second-hand retail in general, see for example Han 2013:2, 75.

while lately a higher social stratum has also become interested in such clothing (Bratanič 2014:28). The “euphoria” surrounding the wearing of vintage and fashion branded used clothing supposedly began in 2009, when vintage weekends were introduced (Fajt 2014:159; Munda 2014:67; cf. Pi. K. 2013), with foreigners or tourists being the most common visitors at such events. In comparison to the situation at the turn of the millennium, customers have changed. Nowadays there are:

“Those who need items but cannot afford to buy them as new and at the same time do not want to go to Caritas or to the Red Cross. Then there are those consumers who do not have prejudices about used clothing, who do not see their social or symbolic value, but mostly their usefulness. And then there are those creative individuals, capable of producing clothes with their own hands, making unique creations out of cheap second-hand items” (Recek 2015; cf. Munda 2014:67 and Škerjanc 2011a:19).

Due to an “altered awareness and following the example of the rest of Europe” (Klančar 2012:17), prejudices towards used garments have supposedly decreased, especially among younger customers. The question of whether second-hand clothes shops were also selling the clothes of the deceased were common a decade ago, and according to sellers reflected people’s prejudices (Bratanič 2014:28),<sup>21</sup> while nowadays such questions are no longer asked. Nevertheless, the commercial and profitable sale of used clothing for adults is still perceived to be a risky business:

“It seems that Slovenia is one of those small countries where people find it difficult to open up and escape prejudices and fear from the foreign and unknown [...] taking into account the mentality and people’s attitude towards purchasing used clothes, Slovenia still lags behind other European countries [...], both in terms of environmental consciousness as well as in terms of social integrity, we are twenty years behind [...] we are willing to give up on personal progress and knowledge at the expense of material things” (Klančar 2012:17–19; cf. Bratanič 2014 and N. G. 2013).

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<sup>21</sup> However, they also prove and reflect exactly the historical memory surrounding use of and trading in second-hand clothing.

Perceiving second-hand clothing as “dirty or appropriate only for the underprivileged or socially disadvantaged” (Munda 2014:69), and their retail as a sign of poverty, was often considered a reflection of the prejudices and fears of traditionalistic or reactionary Slovenes (*ibid.*:68–69; cf. N. G. 2013 and Recek 2015). Nevertheless, journalists and researchers have not equally ascribed traditionalism and conservatism to all the social strata of Slovene society. Only its marginalized or socially weakest strata were commonly recognized as having the strongest prejudices against buying used clothes, which is supposedly why people more willingly come to pick them up at Carinthia’s centre for the processing of used and discarded textiles – being situated on the outskirts of the town allows people to be less exposed to the public eye than elsewhere (Detela 2015:24). Similarly, the middle class as well as younger consumers from one smaller Slovenian town avoid second-hand garments, since – as the journalist gauged – to be “in” means “one has to have only the best and the most expensive clothes” (Škerjanc 2011b:18). The sellers also concluded that the Slovenian market is “simply too small” for buying used clothes from Slovenes, because “it would be impossible to sell them”. On their view, people avoid buying local used garments since they could be perceived as poor, and asked questions such as: “Did this item belong to my neighbour?” (Škerjanc 2011a:19). In “a geographically and mentally small surrounding, where people fear of being quickly revealed”, according to the sellers, people are consequently afraid of being mocked, in ways such as: “Look at her, she wears my cardigan” (Recek 2015). Or in the words of one Slovenian sociologist: since there is no tradition of a relaxed attitude towards recycling and reusing things, second-hand shops are mostly still perceived as conveying poverty and are therefore avoided:

“In economic terms we all want to be equal. Therefore we are still a highly egalitarian society. In fact we were poor and the new has always been highly appreciated. With the accumulation of the new, we want to place ourselves higher on the social scale” (Milič 2012:15).

Given that prejudices surrounding hygiene, and associations of second-hand clothing with poverty and the deceased are generally

commonplace,<sup>22</sup> it is therefore interesting that Slovenian public discourses frequently appropriate them inside of a Slovenian specificity, and link them to a supposedly specific socialist mentality. For example, the following quote was posted on an online forum: “Some time ago [...] there was a television broadcast about these stores. Unfortunately, I think they all failed, since Slovenian mentality does not approve of them” (Vikking 2008). Or: “We are stuck in socialism. Such bartering is regarded as reserved for the poor, while for example in England many people exchange things irrespective of their social status” (Milič 2012:15; cf. Škerjanc 2011a and Vikking 2008).

### **CONTEMPORARY SECOND-HAND CLOTHES SHOPS – A PREMODERN REMNANT OR A TRENDY NOVELTY?**

Moving towards drawing a conclusion, we can apply a general history of second-hand clothes retail<sup>23</sup> to Slovenia: the material shows that antique and consignment (commission) shops were historically known in the country, while various kinds of historically present stores selling second-hand garments have been disappearing since at least the 1960s. Vintage shops and second-hand shops with the majority of garments obtained abroad via the specialized channels of textile banks or foreign humanitarian

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<sup>22</sup> When the value of second-hand clothing was recognized, such garments were often sold in pawn shops, and for the sellers thus became an alternative form of payment. Buyers on the other hand perceived second-hand clothing as more modern, or clothing of a better quality, which not only met clothing needs, but could also satisfy one’s aspirations for a revamped outfit and for giving an impression of possessing a higher social status. Historically, second-hand clothing was therefore not only associated with poverty, population transfers, various illnesses and deaths, it was also a sign of an individual’s specific style and uniqueness (Norris 2012:133; cf. Introduction 2005:3; Jenss 2010:171–172; Lemire 2005:44; Stobart and Van Damme 2010:4–7; Le Zotte 2013).

<sup>23</sup> The history of second-hand trade in clothing is, generally speaking, as long as the history of manufacturing garments. However, we can – at least according to Norris – divide it up into three main periods or methods of handling used clothing: first there was an era of pawn-shops, followed by the flourishing of trade during colonialism and the development of humanitarian organizations that up until the (late) nineteenth century also started to collect used garments. In the first half of the twentieth century thrift shops appeared, while after the Second World War with the rise of consumerism, other types of specialized stores for selling second-hand clothing became popular as well (Norris 2012:133; cf. Jenss 2010; Lemire 2005; Stobart and Van Damme 2010; Le Zotte 2013).

organizations are, on the other hand, a global novelty that was also recently introduced to Slovenia.

After having proven that public opinion concerning the lack of a tradition of second-hand clothes shops in Slovenia is deficient, I now turn to the “specifically Slovenian socialist mentality” as the main reason for this perception of a (false) lack. According to contemporary Slovenian public discourses on second-hand clothes retail, (late) socialist notions of modernity have lately also become outdated. As media reports suggest, the values of originality and nostalgia, coupled with an environmental awareness, are replacing the appreciation of the new and function as signs of (post-)modernity (cf. Appelgren and Bohlin 2015b:143). Buying (as well as wearing and appropriating) used clothing no longer seems to be a sign of any kind of poverty. On the contrary, it is seen as a sign of one’s modernness, individuality and (trendy environmental) responsibility, also expressed in terms of fashion or moral choice. Hence, if decades ago second-hand shops were considered as remnants of the (unwanted, pre-socialist) past, nowadays they are depicted as (one of the) bearers of modernity or even of the future. Just as decades ago such shops – before they converted into “hard currency shops” – were related to poverty and pre-modernity, today such perceptions of them are presented as “backward”, “mentally conservative” and burdened with “prejudices against anything new”, as remnants of a (late) “socialist mentality”. However, it is far from unimportant that such mentality is most often ascribed to marginal and lower social strata, seen as the losers of transition, incapable of adjusting themselves to the new situation (cf. Buchowski 2006 and Habinc 2015). However, later – if the modern society of late socialism was perceived as a society in which second-hand clothes shops were no longer needed, and in which the premodern garments of the commission shops were replaced with new, luxury and desired garments, contemporary second-hand consumption is publicly presented as a choice made by a modern, reflective individual, and not an act relating to (an economic) need. Nevertheless, such an alternative, while still being a consumerist choice, can just be a smart marketing disguise for hiding contemporary (not only post-socialist) inequalities, poverty and social loss of privilege, since what the literature calls “first-option, but only second-choice” consumption is according to many still a form of consumption based on “what one can



afford” (Bardhi and Arnould 2005:230).<sup>24</sup> In any case, when paving the path for contemporary second-hand clothes retail, public opinion makers find it necessary to distance their perceptions about such retail from the presently unwanted (late) socialist past, and the tradition that existed (cf. Habinc 2015). Such substituting of the old with the new without making any connections between them – once again – seems more than anything else to be the main “Slovenian specificity” relating to the contemporary use and selling of second-hand clothing.

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<sup>24</sup> On the intertwinement of necessity and choice cf. Cervellon et al. 2012; Downing Peters 2014; Fredriksson 2013; Miller 2005; Roux and Guiot 2009; Roux and Korchia 2006; Williams and Paddock 2003.

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Mateja Habinc

## TRGOVINE RABLJENOM ODJEĆOM U SLOVENIJI: SUVREMENA SITUACIJA U SVOJOJ (NE)POVIJESNOJ PERSPEKTIVI

Nakon što nas upozna je s povijesnim i suvremenim pregledom maloprodaje rabljenom odjećom u Sloveniji, autorica govori o njezinu izumiranju koje je započelo 60-ih godina prošlog stoljeća. Prema javnom mnijenju u Sloveniji, kao glavni razlozi za nedostatak ovakve vrste trgovine danas navodi se nepostojanje takve tradicije i “socijalistički mentalitet”. Takav mentalitet navodno je počeo prevladavati tijekom doba gospodarskog rasta i socijalističkog konzumerizma tijekom 60-ih i 70-ih godina prošlog stoljeća kad se kupnja rabljene odjeće povezivala sa siromaštvom i predmodernim dobom. Međutim, autorica tvrdi da se u posljednje vrijeme percepcije modernosti mijenjaju, između ostalog, i zato što ga javni diskurs distancira od neželjene socijalističke prošlosti.

**Ključne riječi:** rabljena odjeća, maloprodaja, Slovenija, postsocijalizam, modernizacija

## TRGOVINE Z RABLJENIMI OBLAČILI U SLOVENIJI: SODOBNA SITUACIJA U NJENI (A)HISTORIČNI PERSPEKTIVI

Članek nasprotuje slovenskemu javnomu mnenju, po katerem v Sloveniji ni tradicije trgovanja z rabljenimi oblačili. Na kratko oriše dolgo zgodovino takega trgovanja, ki je bilo od šestdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja za nekaj časa prekinjeno, in se ustavlja ob vprašanju, zakaj je “socialistična mentaliteta” oziroma še natančneje “specifično slovenska socialistična mentaliteta” v javnosti največkrat prepoznana razlog za domnevno pomanjkanje takšnega trgovanja v sodobnosti. Po mnenju avtorice ni nepomembno, da je omenjena mentaliteta najpogosteje pripisana marginaliziranim in nižjim družbenim slojem, ki naj bi trgovanje z rabljenimi oblačili povezovali z revščino in s tem ohranjali njegova predmoderna (socialistična) pojmovanja. Toda javna razumevanja modernizacije so lahko tudi zgolj način prikrivanja sodobnih družbenih razlik.

**Ključne besede:** rabljena oblačila, trgovina, Slovenija, post-socializem, modernizacija



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