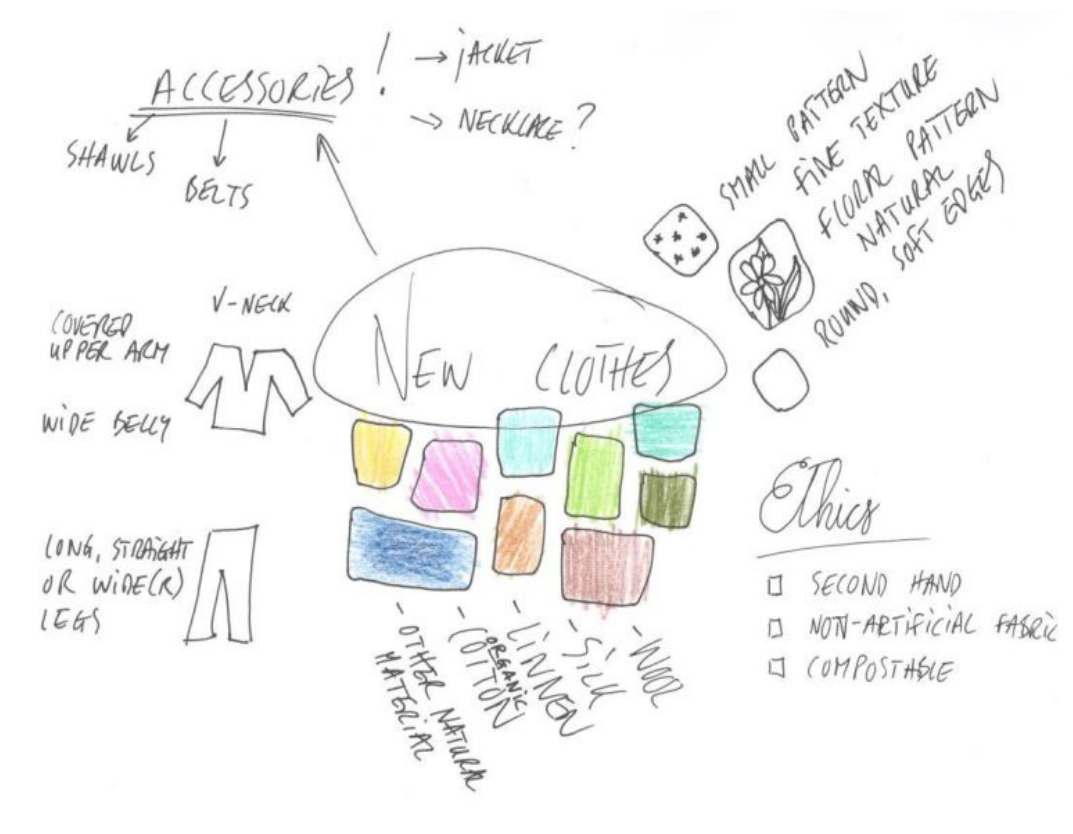


MY UNFASHIONABLE MINIMALISTIC CAPSULE WARDROBE

BARBARA SCHELTUS – VAN DEN BERG

Although I am not picky or stylish, I do sometimes think that "I have nothing to wear". Clothes don't fit, have holes or stains or aren't appropriate for the weather or the occasion.

The function of clothes for me is to keep me comfortable at a good temperature, help me carry around stuff and protect me from too much sun and sharp objects. For me clothes should be designed for that, and not for the idea that you need to differ from others.



About this design

I used Looby Macnamara's Design Web as a framework for this zone 00-design. The idea of a [Capsule Wardrobe](#) inspired me. I used mind maps and observation techniques for this design, MoSCoW (Must do, Should do, Could do, Won't do) for prioritization, Pinterest for collecting ideas and images, and many websites for conversion tables (clothing sizes), information and inspiration. I used principles from Mollison, Holmgren and Macnamara.

Using permaculture ethics for my wardrobe

People care: making a personal permaculture design for what I wear brings more permaculture into my life. It is an act of self care and saves a good amount of energy.

I would like to simplify and get my wardrobe organised. It would bring me joy to just grab an outfit from my shelves and know that I look and feel fine! Having my wardrobe well organised would save me time and energy, and give me more confidence so that I can be the best version of me. It also brings more happiness because everything fits and matches.

If skin is permeable, I better not wear artificial or heavily dyed fibres and fabrics.

It is also an act of family care (especially for my teenage kids) when my clothes fit well and don't have (many) holes or stains. They don't have to be too embarrassed.

Earth care: assembling a wardrobe that fits well, brings happiness and therefore creates less waste. With an excellent set of clothes I don't need to buy new and it is likely that I will take good care of them and repair them when broken.

If I accidentally rip a hole in my clothes made of natural fibres, I can easily repair it myself. Wool and silk can be felted, cotton can be mended so my clothes will last longer.

And if clothes become waste (and can't be given away), they will not weigh heavy on my footprint because I will choose only natural fibres and clothes that can decompose. In the past I have successfully used clothes as weed suppressors in the garden.

This design will be read by volunteers and course participants and maybe others. It might inspire them to be more conscious about earth care with their own clothing choices.

Fair share: I want less items with better quality, that are "locally" or at least ethically resourced. Better to spend my money for good quality at local businesses than to follow cheap fashion that needs updating every short while.

The clothes that I don't need, will be recycled, given away or decomposed when they are at the end of their cycle. Old clothes from the family are usually used by volunteers as work clothes. Sometimes volunteers need extra clothes because their stay covers more seasons.

This design brings care for a more sustainable future. By publishing this design it might inspire others to be more conscious about their footprint for the future as well.

Vision

My wardrobe is filled with beautiful, good quality, long lasting clothes that match my lifestyle needs in that season. All items fit well and match, so that getting dressed is easy and quick.

My clothes are repairable and compostable, made of natural fibres like wool, silk, linnen and (organic) cotton.

When I need something new, I know exactly what I need and I have a mental checklist with my sizes, colour scheme, preferred style and I know what materials to choose.

Limits

I have clothes that don't fit, that are really silly, that don't match with anything else or have stains or holes that are too big/showing things.

I have no clue about my size(s); it seems that my upper body has a bigger size than my butt, and my legs are relatively tall.

Male and female sizes seem to not have anything to do with each other and in the second hand shop the size-labels are often missing.

My physical wardrobe is small: 2 shelves of 110cm each, a basket for socks and a basket for underwear. No hang space, except the coat rack where I hang my 2 hoodies.

44	in The Netherlands
= 48	in France
= 52	in Italy
= 20	in UK and Australia
= 18	in US
= 19-21	in Japan



When I'm working (in the garden or somewhere on the terrain), it is possible that visitors arrive or a camping guests wants my attention. I need to look somewhat representative so I can't just wear my stained old clothes with holes.

I don't wear an apron while cooking, a daily activity where I collect a lot of stains.

I need big pockets and in some women's clothing the pockets are sewed closed so it are NOT pockets!(!!!) Men's pockets are much bigger and deeper and only men's jeans are made of real jeans fabric. I cannot limit my wardrobe to clothes designed and made for women.



The content of my pockets. They can also contain a phone, seeds, vegetables, coins, eggs (!), screws, a comb and permanent markers.

The majority of the clothes in shops is made of synthetic materials. Synthetic clothes disregulate my temperature, do something to static energy, they smell bad, can't be healthy, can't be repaired and I don't want to bring it into our environment. I prefer wool, silk, bamboo, organic cotton and other natural, breathing materials.

I am willing to spend my money in a second hand shop, or in a small, privately owned shop with preferably home made clothes; not on big chains that exploit kids in poor countries.

I have a sewing machine but I haven't found a place to buy nice fabric here in Croatia.

Helps

I am ready for an intentionally put together wardrobe that fits me, also literally.

I don't care about fashion; I care about nice fabric and well made timeless clothes.

I noticed that men's clothing is made of stronger fabric so will last longer.

My woollen underwear is a big help to always have the right temperature on my body and to lift load off the laundry. Wool I hang in the sun, wind and rain to clean.

My sewing machine and my mum who taught me how to sew are big helps.

The second hand shop in Karlovac is a help.

Pinterest.com helps with ideas and patterns.

Etsy.com for home made clothes (and ideas to make them myself).

The internet for free patterns and size conversion tables.



My mum sewing a blouse for me

Patterns

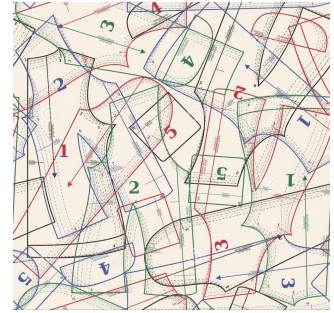
My lifestyle pattern is that I am "always" around other people (guests, volunteers, course participants, people in the village or city) from early spring until the end of autumn. So I need to look acceptable and somewhat representative all day.

I am not aware of my style and I don't know which colours and patterns fit me well. So I buy random pieces that I individually like, but don't go well together with me and/or with my other clothes. This pattern is unhelpful if I want a clean and neat wardrobe.

The patterns I see in my favourite clothes, are "warm", "nature" and "flowers". There aren't any abstract or angular patterns; everything is "soft" and round and natural. Also the materials should be soft and natural. The colours in my wardrobe are natural ones (except in my jeans). Greens, pink, beige... From now on I will call this pattern "my style".

Another pattern is that I have no clue about my size, and in my mind I am much taller and slimmer than in reality. So I keep picking clothes that are too small for me. Knowing my size and being critical will disrupt this pattern.

Sewing patterns are easy to find online these days. And I can also make my own patterns, from clothes that fit well.



Ideas



Mind map for the Ideas anchor point

Assess all my clothes and let go of the pieces that don't fit, that are really silly, don't match or that have irreparable holes or unwashable stains.

Rearrange my wardrobe into 3 categories:

1. work clothes: strong wear for gardening and outdoors
use: almost daily
2. city & course clothes: beautiful, colourful, "me"
use: 2x weekly, or 10 days
3. special clothes: sports, wedding, funeral
use: sporadically

City clothes that are getting too old, I will let go to the work clothes collection. In that way the colour scheme of my work clothes will slowly adjust to my city clothes scheme, and in the end my entire wardrobe will fit together!

Put the pieces that are not suitable for the season in a transparent box under the bed. Transparent so I can see what is where, if the weather suddenly changes.

I will also put the special (funeral/wedding) clothes under the bed.

Make a give-and-take-box in which volunteers and camping guests can find reusables.

Really bad pieces can go as weed suppressor in a garden bed.

Turn my wardrobe into a "capsule wardrobe": a collection of a few essential items that don't go out of fashion. It are interchangeable items in a colour scheme, to maximize the number of outfits that can be created with just a few items.

An "official capsule wardrobe" has 30-40 items per season: 160 pieces of clothing for 4 seasons and socks, sportswear and pyjama's are not included! I can use a simplified capsule wardrobe for 2 "seasons": warm and cold. That amount might also fit on my 2 shelves.

Do an online style and colour test to see what matches with me, my skin and hair colour.

I could design "outfit recipes" and hang them next to my shelves. I take my few pairs of trousers as a base, and make note of which tops go well with each of them. Maybe go as far as trying them on and playing with them, adding accessories (that I don't really have...)? Make a mind map with pictures for each pair of trousers and their fits. With these outfit recipe sheets I will never have to think about my outfit any more. If more items fall out and I cross them off the mind map, I can see when I run low on matching clothes for my trousers. In this way it is easy to see when it is time to buy new items.

Make re-dressing easy by hanging gardening clothes in the garden tool shed. The right gear in the right place.

Wear an apron while cooking!

The whole size-thing can be solved once and for all by measuring myself in detail, and noting it down in a drawing. Next I can look up the international sizes for my trousers and my shirts, and note/picture everything in my phone.

This drawing of my body and its measures also comes in handy with sewing my own clothes.

Do an online sewing course on Udemy.com to refresh my skills and get inspired.

Make clothes myself. I can choose sustainable fabrics, put on all the pockets and other functionality I need.

Practice with these cool ways to mend clothes, with nice patches of (different) fabric on or under the hole, with embroidery or Japanese "sashiko", with felting sheep wool on woollen clothes or other natural fibres...

These mending techniques can also be used to cover up unwashable stains!

Woollen socks can be repurposed as arm warmers, old jeans can become handbags or supply of strong pockets. Unwearable knitted jumpers become balls of yarn again to knit or crochet something new.

Get more wool from the neighbours and pick up my felting skills again. I could start with felting hats, slippers and shawls, and level it up later with felting jackets or something.



Go without clothes. It would be very handy not to have to think about clothes at all, and our climate is good for going naked at least 5 months a year.

Principles

This design is all about finding creative solutions for the clothing part of a more sustainable life. Observing my needs and my wardrobe, move the tools and interacting by reorganizing, cycle & recycle it for sustainability.

A good quality capsule wardrobe will catch and store a lot of energy. It saves head space, irritability and worry-energy. I think that the capsule wardrobe concept in itself (a limited amount of timeless and interchangeable items in a colour scheme) is a principle.

Emergence happens in relationships. The capsule wardrobe idea of 6 pieces to make 30 outfits is improving connections between the elements and stacking functions. All individual items should be matching with at least 5 other items! Least change for the greatest effect in a way.

Use and value renewable resources: natural fabrics regulate my body temperature much better than synthetic fibres could. So with natural fabrics I catch and store my own energy.

My clothes cycle and recycle and I produce no waste: I buy second hand, repair or adjust and give unsuitable clothes for others to use. Or I creatively use and respond to change by using (unsightly) items as weed-suppressor in my garden beds, or cut up old socks and turn them into dishwashing scrubbies (tawashi).

Waste not want not: if it is clear what my size, style, colours and my needs are, I will not buy something that doesn't meet the criteria. Learn from earlier mistakes and be prepared (with a checklist).

Integration

The key functions in my wardrobe are:

- I need strong and comfortable work clothes that fit me, for outdoors and gardening, that are good enough to wear around guests and visitors and make an OK first impression.
- I need 7 outfits for the city/going out/courses. If a course is longer than a week, I can (wash and) re-wear items.
- I need 2 formal outfits: 1 for a wedding and 1 for a funeral.
- I need a (mental) check list with my size, my colours, my style and preferred fabrics. If an item doesn't tick all boxes, it's a NO.

I MUST DO

Observe and interact: make an assessment of my current clothes and make a selection based on my size, sustainability and the representability.

Follow the concept of a "capsule wardrobe" for 2 seasons: "warm" and "cold" and select 30-40 items per season that are interchangeable items in a colour scheme.

Make a give and take box as recycle-point near the garbage on the campsite. It is an act of people care, earth care AND fair share!

I SHOULD DO

For my city clothes I choose a colour scheme that goes well with all the good items that I have. With this colour scheme I can make more "connections": 1 pair of cream coloured trousers can go with at least 5, but possibly 10 other pieces of city tops.

Collect old clothes that can't be mended or given away, and repurpose them as weed suppressors in the garden or food forest.



Make a strong, knee covering gardening apron (with several small pockets for seeds, some big pockets for tools, fruits and and vegetables) to protect my clothes. It is easy to put on and take off so it makes it possible to wear representative clothes while gardening. If I hang my garden apron in the garden tool shed I have an easy and accessible "tool" in the right location.

I COULD DO

Get a transparent box for wedding and funeral outfits that can go under the bed.

I could make it a habit to mend clothes (and tea towels) in a beautiful way (embroidery, sashiko) while watching a movie, or while I am in a car but not driving, or while I am done and others are still eating, or other openings in time. For this a "mending basket" would help.

I WON'T DO

I will not start making all my own clothes and I will not pick up felting again. It needs much more practice and patience than I am willing to give or have time for.

I won't do an online style & colour test that fits my skin and hair colour; I don't care and I don't have time for that. And also: what if the internet doesn't agree with the style of my current favourite clothes...

Design "outfit recipes" and hang them next to my wardrobe. Too much effort for too little benefit and it doesn't leave space for emergence.

I will not go without clothes because it doesn't meet my key needs. I need sun and sharp objects protection and as a business owner I need to look somewhat representative. And if I want to practice people care I shouldn't embarrass my teenage kids and shock volunteers and visitors by being naked.

Action

Start with looking at what others do with capsule wardrobes. Make a Pinterest board to collect ideas on how to dress, to stretch my ideas and beliefs. ([here](#))

Make a drawing of my body, measure all parts and note it.

Look up the clothing sizes for it and note them in my phone so I always have it with me.

Get organized and go through *all* my clothes with a checklist:

- ✓ Does it fit?
- ✓ Is it my style/will I wear it?
- ✓ Is the colour right for me?
- ✓ Does it match with at least 5 other items?
- ✓ Work clothes: are they strong and cool/breathing?

Old "city clothes" that aren't good enough any more to present myself well, can go on the work clothes pile.

Install a give-and-take-box near the garbage collection point on our campsite

Old clothes that are not good enough to mend or give away, can immediately be buried under the mulch around trees and shrubs on our terrain. Handle-only-once: don't make a pile of rags that gets forgotten.

Find or make a good sewing pattern for a knee long garden apron and make it. Sew on the pockets of old jeans.

Find a nice way to mend the holes in my clothes. Find out more about sashiko.

Make a Pinterest board for ideas about mending ([here](#)).

Install a "mending basket": a portable supply kit to mend clothes.

Find a transparent box that fits under the bed

Momentum

When my capsule wardrobe is there, I should take good care of it so it will last long. Not wash my clothes too often, not wash them too hot (30° or 40° is enough), don't dry colourful items in the full sun to prevent discolouring.

The idea of a capsule wardrobe will get more and more momentum over time because from this moment on I will only buy or accept clothes that fit in! Fit the colour scheme, fit the patterns that go well with me, fit my size... the concept of a capsule wardrobe will grow stronger once it is installed.



Appreciation

I love the simplicity of the whole idea of a capsule wardrobe! Thank you Susie Faux!

In summer 2020 I first heard about a capsule wardrobe. A bit late: the concept already exists for a long time and was revived in the 1970's by Susie Faux. I read an (old) article about it and immediately loved the idea, for so many reasons! The simplicity, the mind space it frees up, to have matching clothes in my wardrobe, to have boundaries and a (mental) checklist for buying new things... The idea of matching clothes really resonates with me. To just grab the first trousers and shirt and they match and make me look good! Wow.

I appreciate my collection of woollen underwear because it makes that I can wear "anything" over it, even in the coldest weather.

What I appreciate about myself is that I don't need much. I appreciate all items on my 2 shelves and I'll be happy to use my creativity repairing them when necessary.

I also appreciate it that I never felt an urge to go shopping for new clothes. I am a functional buyer: I buy clothes when I really need them. Waste not want not.

Big appreciation for an unknown camping guest who left a big transparent box that fits perfectly under the bed! Therefore also thank you Universe for hearing my wish!

Reflections

This design made me wonder if I should be more stylish. I decided not. Because I can carry that idea around only for a short time; it just doesn't have my interest. And it would bring new problems! While wearing clothes is just something practical for me, being stylish would probably come with restrictions (like no pockets). I live with hot wood stoves, sharp gravel roads, sun, snow, insects, sticking out branches and brambles, staining berries...

In winter I just wear many layers of wool under a top layer for the looks. I noticed that I don't have many nice top layers to look different every day, but I don't have to because in winter I see much less people. So my few winter outfits are fine for now.

In September 2021 I facilitated a week long social permaculture course in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I went there 2 days before and afterwards I took another 3 days. I packed my best clothes and yes, I had enough to look good for 12 days! My unfashionable minimalistic capsule wardrobe seems to work.

While browsing the internet for information about how to match your clothes with your hair and skin type, I found out that there is also something like a "body type". They speak about all kinds of fruit as a metaphor but I see myself more as a big banana than as an apple or a pear. Next they speak about A-line and V-neckline, empire cuts, palazzos, scoops... a new realm with new vocabulary opened up for me. I quickly decided to ignore it.

2024: this approach of my clothing still works for me. I still have 2 shelves but they are a bit more full now. I found a second hand shop where items cost € 1,- to € 3,-, I started looking in the men's department, I know my jeans size and shirt size now... I also made more shirts, together with my mother. So now I have several items to choose from, in all weather types.

Reflections on the implementation

It was a joy to think of, write up and implement this design! It was satisfactory like running the defragmentation program on a computer. Afterwards my wardrobe was clean, clear, organized and meaningful.

The implementation of this design was cheap and quick. No actual costs spent; just some time. I found a transparent box for under the bed on our camp ground, left by a guest.

I went through my clothes with a checklist:

1. Does it fit?
2. Is it my style/will I wear it?
3. Is the colour right for me?
4. Does it match with at least 5 other items?
5. Work clothes: are they strong and cool/breathing?

Applying the first criterium was easy; only 1 good pair of too small jeans I couldn't part with. I will keep it for times when I weigh less :-D

All clothes that didn't fit anymore, went to the (give and) take box for volunteers and in winter I bring clothes to the Red Cross.

The second criterium was also easy and threw out a few items that were only occupying space and collecting dust. (What was I thinking when I bought them!)

I collected visual ideas on [my Pinterest board](#) and extracted "my style" from it.

The third criterium about the colour was a hard one, and I decided that my underwear (and I can wear 3 or 4 layers in winter!) can be black or another "wrong" colour.

So what was left at this time, sort of automatically matched at least 5 other items. Sometimes with a bit of fantasy or an extra item (shawl) to make it work.

Criterium 5 was the hardest one. For working outdoors I wear old jeans most of the year, or any short trousers (cut off jeans) in warmer weather. Usually old jeans that used to be strong, but are about to get holes. Does that still meet the criterium?

While working outdoors I wear any old t-shirt or blouse that I would not wear to the city. Since I repaired some beautiful blouses and got rid of ugly ones, there weren't many work clothes left...

I decided to work outdoors in old trousers and "good" shirts, and I make sure to keep them good.

The apron I did make, but I didn't hang it in the garden shed so I never wear it while gardening. In the shed it quickly becomes a spider hotel and I also think that it is too warm to wear more layers while working in the garden.

Instead I do sometimes take off clothes while gardening (alone), so clothes don't get stained.

The "outfit recipes" from the Integration anchor point I never made and now I wonder if they would be useful. I just work from top to bottom/take the first item from the stack, but recently my husband mentioned that he makes sure that his shirts have a different colour than his trousers. An insignificant remark for most people I believe, but it still puzzles me. Are there rules that I don't know of!? Do I need a framework to dress myself? Am I lost (without knowing it) without these outfit recipes? I might still give them a try, and make the outfit recipes together with my husband (who is quite stylish and apparently knows more rules for dressing yourself).

After critically cleaning out my 2 shelves and the boxes under the bed, I noted that I only needed a new bra! And ideally some good quality work clothes in the future.

The best part of this all is that I have all of my clothes, yes ALL of them, for all seasons, on my 2 shelves! It fits easily! I have 47 pieces for all seasons. Or 50, when I also count my 2 shawls and a special belt.

An "official capsule wardrobe" has 30-40 items per season so I have space (but not on my shelves) to buy more. That idea gives me a lot of breathing space!



Reflection on the design process

I like starting with a vision as opposed to starting with a goal, because it gives space for emergence. If my goal would have been to design my ultimate capsule wardrobe, I would have had to buy 73 (!!!) extra items to meet the criteria!

So this design started with Vision, and also with Integration because the idea for the design was born when I read about the concept of a capsule wardrobe. It fits all the needs and it fits my physical space.

The Limits-anchor point gave me a few insights. Like: it is not weird that I don't know my clothing size if there is not a universal system for sizes. This info box with eye roll-emoji says it all!

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The limits anchor point made me aware that there is a whole other world out there, in which women have to *reduce* their wardrobe to 30-40 pieces per season, so let's say to a maximum of 160 items. It made me realize that one's limits are personal.

For a minute I wondered if I had to feel bad for being a woman who doesn't dress up. Is it limiting me? No I don't think so.

For me the limits of a capsule wardrobe gave so much space! There is a quote in German from Goethe: *In der Beschränkung zeigt sich der Meister* / mastery shows in restrictions. Limitations can give structure and precision, and can bring a strong foundation. That all seems the case with a capsule wardrobe for me.

The Helps anchor point gave me new love for my woollen underwear and my sewing machine. Both give a lot more possibilities. I can wear many layers of wool under a thin blouse in winter: I don't necessarily need warm sweaters!

I thought I didn't have a style, but observing the patterns on my shelves taught me that I like colourful but soft colours, natural, floral patterns.

To experience working with new tools, I categorized my Action points with the prioritization tool MoSCoW: Must do, Should do, Could do, Won't do. But then it categorized what should have been free thinking, and it looked like decision making. So I un-did MoSCoW at Ideas and moved it to Integration.

MoSCoW is nice to look through a lens of honesty but it seemed to conflict with the Principles anchor point, which is already a decision making tool. So I am not sure how to use MoSCoW in a permaculture design yet.

While brainstorming with myself for the Ideas anchor point, I got so enthusiastic with some ideas that I immediately turned them into action. So for the Integration anchor point I had to really do my best and retract

my steps and decisions.

I came up with this great idea of a gardening apron and I made one, but I never wear it in the garden. It seems not strong enough (at the knees especially), although I wouldn't know because I never wear it...

For the first time in using the Design Web, I realized that it is a framework for *designing*. Land based frameworks usually have an implementation and evaluation part, and I missed that during this design.

Maybe it also had to do with the (small) scale of this project, and the emphasis on action. In bigger projects the design part (thinking through the *what* and the *how*) feels more important.

Pause

Designing my unfashionable minimalistic capsule wardrobe and implementing this design was a fun break from all the serious parts of my life.

I think that the implementation of this design and having a capsule wardrobe will give me more time to pause. Or at least ease of mind, because I don't have to give much thought to what I wear any more.

Maybe after a while, taking a pause in being concerned with my clothes, I am ready for something new. New clothes, a new style, a new shelf...?

