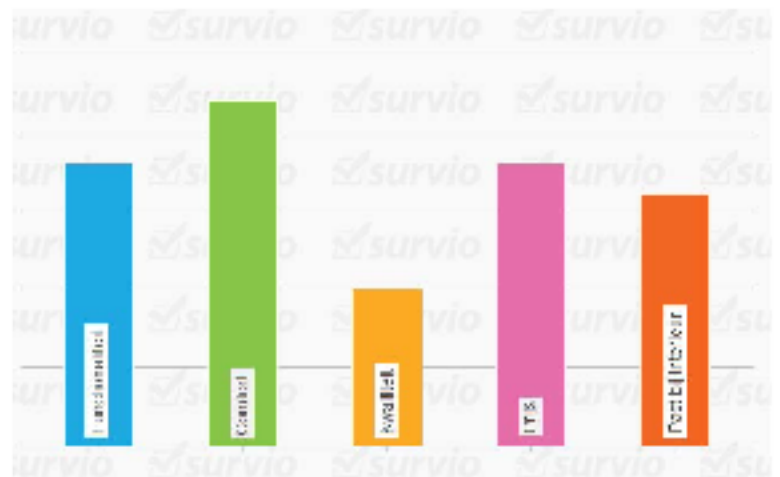


## How to share a chair

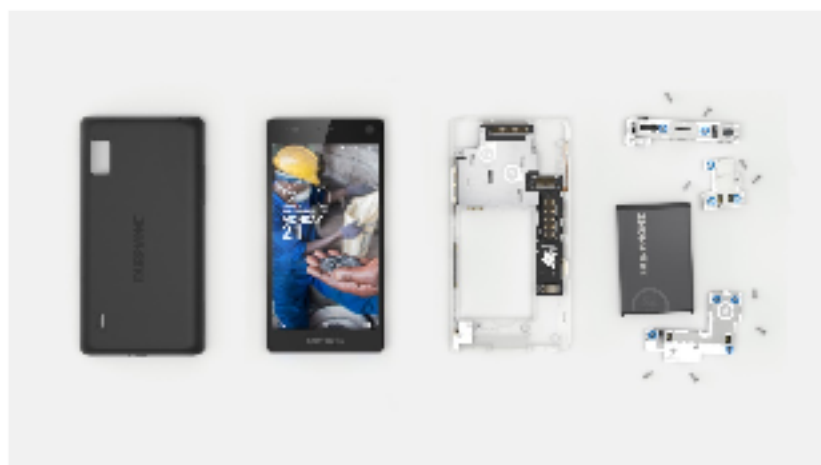
The throw-away society. New ownership. Used but functional furniture. These were the key elements in my search for a more sustainable solution to the furniture waste problem. A problem that I wanted to solve by changing the way people think about their furniture.

In a survey I took people noted that the quality of the product when buying furniture is of the least importance, while price and comfort stood at the top. This is typical for the throw-away society, which encourages to cheaply replace your low quality stuff when it breaks, instead of repairing it or buying something that'll live longer. So to prevent the furniture from being thrown out I needed people to care more about it and see it as more than just a replaceable product.



I wanted to accomplish this by letting people work on the chair themselves. That way they would form a connection to the product. This is in line with the ideas of Karl Marx about people and the ownership they feel about stuff. Already from the beginning of the 50's he argues that a man that does not buy the stuff he produces and not produces the stuff he buys will not recognize products as the fruit of his labour. The result is that he will feel alienated from the stuff he buys, so he will never feel proper ownership. This results in the excessive buying and careless treatment of his stuff (throw-away society), which results in excessive waste. As we can see if we take a look around us, Marx' vision about the results of capitalism came largely true and I figured that his idea that a person should work on its own product was relevant in this case.

But beside this, I wanted to incorporate the sharing community as well, because I really like the idea of open design. By working together on a piece of furniture and sharing ideas and experiences you



can lift a product to a higher level. A good example of this would be the fairphone. This is a phone which came to life by lots of different people working on the design. The result is a phone of which the fabrication process is transparent, so you can see how and where it is produced. It is also possible to simply replace broken parts instead of replacing the whole phone, which is a good answer to excessive waste.

To test if my concept would also work in reality, I asked three students if they would like to share a chair. I targeted students especially, because they mostly prefer cheap furniture and still change it a lot (because they are not yet very settled). They started off enthusiastic but soon I realized that it wasn't going to work. First of all was my test group way too busy with deadlines and other stuff to really care about working on a chair. Secondly, one of the arm rests that someone made on the chair broke off almost immediately when someone else sat on it. And lastly, the test persons didn't actually want to share the chair that they worked on.



So in reality it turned out that if someone isn't really into working on furniture they will probably not feel motivated enough to start. Furthermore, if people without knowledge just start working on furniture the possibility that it will break or is not safe is quite high. And lastly, the test persons didn't actually want to share the chair after they worked on it since it felt like 'their' chair afterwards and they were proud of what they did. So even if my concept didn't work out, Marx' idea about ownership proved true.



So despite the fact that my concept didn't hold in reality, the research can be used as a stepping stone for new projects. Other ideas that I got from my research and the test persons would be to tattoo the chair with a lasercutter. In that case people will get a custom made chair which holds a special memory but they won't have to go through the trouble of sharing the furniture. This tattooing can be done at per example a fab lab, so people still have the chance to do it themselves. Or there could be a platform which brings people together so they can work on furniture together. In that case there is both the fact that someone worked on the chair themselves as well as the experience of doing it together. But to see if those theories work out there will be the need to test them of course.