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FACULTY OF DESIGN

**TIME AS A GIFT:  
RETHINKING GIFT-GIVING THROUGH DIGITALISATION**

**ÜHINE AEG KUI KINGITUS -  
DIGITALISEERIMISE VÕIMALUSED KINKIMISE  
ÜBERMÕTESTAMISEL**

MASTER THESIS

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Time as a Gift: Rethinking Gift-Giving Through Digitalisation

*in Estonian:*

Ühine aeg kui kingitus - Digitaliseerimise võimalused kinkimise ümbermõtestamisel

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1. Understand the reasons for gift-failure
2. Explore existing solution space and identify possibilities for new solutions
3. Propose a design concept to support rethinking the gift-giving experience

**Thesis tasks and time schedule:**

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## **PREFACE**

Gifts have been around for a long time and they are not going anywhere, nor should they. They can bring us a lot of joy and help us communicate our feelings to the ones we care about. But the act of gift-giving has changed over time and has become more of a burden than a joy.

While there are ways to minimise failure in gift-giving there is not a good alternative practice to take its place. The gesture of showing care and appreciation keeps orbiting around consumerism and buying a physical thing. However, it turns out people might prefer experiences to stuff and they enjoy what accompanies the gift more than the gift itself. It is becoming more and more apparent that giving time instead of things merits serious consideration when it is time to give the next gift.

This thesis proposes a digital platform, Momenta, that focuses on sharing our time with others and aims to encourage conversation around personal needs and preferences and support personal tradition creations for families, and friend groups, but also on an individual level. Users set their goals and with the help of the platform move towards achieving them. Momenta aims to leverage the information provided during the user's everyday life to encourage and support tradition development.

I see Momenta as a way to help shift the current understanding of what a gift needs to be and re-evaluate our priorities when it comes to time and how and who we spend it with. Are we being intentional enough with spending that precious resource?

*Key words: gift-giving, giving time, shared experiences, digitalisation, personal traditions, master thesis*

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Why do we give gifts? It has been a natural occurrence in most of our lives for as long as we can remember and the majority of us don't seem to object to it. The importance of gifts changes throughout our lives. For most of us, having more importance when we are young and losing its hold as time passes, but it never leaves us completely. With consumer trends slowly shifting towards intentionality and awareness, the attitude towards gift-giving has been impacted as well. Gifts are declined more, people are becoming more precise with their wishes and instructions, and personal beliefs are being highlighted. Having a sustainable mindset around gifts can help reduce mindless purchases that's value is peace of mind from fulfilling a social expectation. But not looking further from choosing items that promise to be more sustainable or meant for your green friend, doesn't help to solve the actual problems we are still facing – overproduction and overconsumption.

Even though gift-giving is something we have practised regularly throughout our lives, it can still create perplexing situations where we don't know what to get someone, what is appropriate, or how to hide our disappointment when we are on the receiving end. It can also leave us with the burden of unwanted ownership, increase visual noise in our living space, and guilt when deciding to part with a received gift. Year-after-year feeling and seeing the unnecessary stress that is created and the pressure we put on ourselves with adhering to the tradition of giving gifts made me want to look into the reasons behind it and what is stopping us from changing our current behaviour. The goal of this thesis was to find a possible way to intervene, shift the current behavioural norms and propose a design concept that would encourage people to consider alternative solutions to the issue at hand. The question was, what could be the support system for a gift experience to be enjoyable for those involved and the planet we inhabit?

Christmas being the most popular time for gift-giving, a lot of consumer research has been done on the subject and this gives a good chance to provide some statistics about people's gift-giving behaviour. One survey estimates that 51% of British adults receive at least one unwanted gift on Christmas (on average those 21 million people receive three unwanted gifts), 23% of them keep the gifts while 22% regift them. About 11% of the unwanted gifts were sold, 6% were just thrown away and 4,7% of the people were brave enough to give the present back. This means that Brits spent around 6 billion Euros on unwanted gifts last Christmas and 36 million Euros worth of items were simply thrown away. In addition, nearly 10% of the people deliberately bought a present they knew the other person wouldn't like. [1] It is also estimated that Americans will spend 14,5 billion Euros on unwanted gifts in 2022 [2].

While people also lie about liking gotten gifts or not already owning the received items [3], in more serious cases people are willing to go into dept to celebrate the holiday and almost half of Europeans feel forced to spend money on Christmas [4]. In addition to wasted money, the amount of physical waste grows around 20-25% during holidays. New reuse shops are opened to manage the number of donated gifts, but this doesn't guarantee they still won't end up in a landfill [5] and returning items doesn't mean they will be sold again [6]. Adding these steps might even create extra waste through transport and sorting.

But a gift is more than the item it comes as. As a picture is worth a thousand words, so can a gifted item relay a message, when words fail. For example, the simple and universally understood gesture can communicate commitment, gratitude, agreement, support, and pride, among countless other positive reasons that can increase closeness. A gift can be used to gain the attention of a potential partner, start a relationship, or mend one in trouble [7]. And when for some reason the gesture fails, which it often does, it can problematically lead to devaluation of the relationship [8]. But overall, the most common reason for gift-giving is to convey that the giftee is seen as valuable by the gift giver.

This thesis explores possible alternatives for inducing the same emotional rewards that material gifts are meant to provide. Shifts in consumer behaviour, social expectations and pace of life have seeped into gift-giving practices. Once a heart-felt gesture has taken the shape of a box to be ticked on a to-do list.

A possible solution is seen in shifting the attention from streamlining the gift-selection process to creating experiences and giving time instead of things. For this to happen successfully, it is necessary to encourage communication around why we gift and the unnecessary pressure it adds to our lives. This is done through leveraging digital capabilities to capture and recall memories to bring intentionality and stability to the way we give our time to others in an inclusive and encouraging environment that is created with the help of a digital platform that supports creating, developing, and enjoying personal traditions.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Defining the Topic

I find myself surrounded by a lot of things. Not in general “things found in the world around me”, but physical objects found in my home, in my possession. Some bring me a lot of joy, others frustration, annoyance, or even anxiety. However many times I have started to clear out my space, it never seems to have permanence. I can do my best to learn about the quality of products and their impact during different stages of their lifecycle, make conscious decisions on what I bring into my home and what values I wish to support with my choices. But there is a category of items that often raises the question “how did it get here?. I did not choose it”.

Time and again the answer seems to be: it was a gift. Officially presented for a celebration of a birthday, to show affection during Christmas, or just because of a feeling of wanting to bring something back from a holiday abroad. This doesn’t seem to be a big deal at a glance but giving or throwing away gifted items feels wrong. Simultaneously, it can feel wasteful and guilt-inducing. It is a very personal feeling and not everybody can relate, but I’m definitely not alone. Regifting also has a bitter taste to it, even if the item is passed on to someone who you know would appreciate and use it.

Leaving emotions aside, unwanted items do have a more measurable downside – creating excess waste. Some people hold on to items, keep them in their homes and in a way suffer in silence. But people who don’t have the issue with sentimentality or environmental awareness, contribute to the mountains of waste we are seeing in the world. And even if the item itself doesn’t end up in a landfill, resources were spent, and waste was created during the production process.

The overwhelm I feel dealing with unwanted possessions led me to look into the gift-giving process and possible ways to reduce the number of unwanted items we get into our lives without having a say in it. I feel a lot of attention is directed towards sustainable handling of items after their lifetime and less towards encouraging minimising consumption.<sup>2</sup> This is understandable considering telling people not to spend their money is not profitable.

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<sup>2</sup> Exceptions can always be found, in this case from Patagonia who ran an [ad](#) in New York Times on a Black Friday encouraging people to do exactly that – think twice before buying and consume less.

When did the positive activity of presenting each other items with good intentions become a stress-inducing burden and is there a way to rethink the gift-giving process? Or at least find a small way to aid people to find pleasure in the activity again and remove one stressor from the already stressful life.

Research finds that production is the most polluting part of an item's life cycle. But for this thesis, I chose to look at the issue from the consumer's point of view. I believe that in the end, consumers are the ones that can guide the market by creating a demand for different solutions to replace what is currently offered. [9]

One option would have been to concentrate on the unwanted items that are already in people's possession. But that area seems covered by the efforts that are being made toward recycling, up-cycling, and reuse oriented initiatives [10]. Also, I wanted to intervene earlier in the process and stop the unwanted items from reaching people's homes in the first place. The production process felt too early because as mentioned, the demand is fuelled by consumers. The suppliers seem to have conflicting interests between providing a good product and making a profit, and in an economical sense, there aren't many companies that can always choose the integrity of their consumers' decisions with the cost of profit.

An area that also merited consideration was corporate gifts. I've seen companies that do it well and succeed in their goal, which is to show their employees they are cared about. But I have also seen and felt it done poorly. For example, this can happen in smaller companies when emotions are connected to the giving aspect of the process and the choice of the gift is personal to the provider, not the recipient. In this case, refusing a gift with no malice in the intention can still lead to hurt feelings and being offensive to someone. But considering that businesses are composed of individuals, I once again was pulled to concentrate on the individual consumer part of the process.

Therefore looking into personal gift-giving practices and finding a possible solution to issues surrounding it became the direction for this thesis.

## **2.2. Methodology and Theory**

### **2.2.1. Evolution of the research question**

The choice of this topic was fuelled by the excess of production and consumption in the world. It feels that awareness and efforts toward conscious consumption are growing, but at the same time, production and mindless consumption are growing twice as fast. The term sustainability has gained wide usage and in a way, the word itself has lost meaning [11]. This can happen when a term is seen to gain popularity and is then used

in campaigns and product descriptions, but without any merit backing it up. With time and constant misuse, well-meaning words become hollow, overlooked, or even off-putting.

But this was the starting point of the initial research: **How to make the gift-giving process more sustainable?** Accompanied with the overarching question of how the process could be enjoyable to all who are involved as it is supposed to be.

Another term with a similar reputation to *sustainability* is *mindfulness*. I connect most with Ellen J. Langer's description of it as the active process of noticing new things about the current context, other people, and the self [12]. Mindfulness seemed a promising aspect to highlight in the act of gift-giving. Decisions made more intentionally tend to have a better outcome, which in this case could lead to better decision-making in choosing a gift and encouraging activeness in getting to know each other better. The intention behind mindfulness is good and the practices that can be described as such can be beneficial, but as the word itself created more confusion than clarity, the term was abandoned. However, the intentionality of actions kept accompanying the project until the end.

During the research, the understanding of the consumer became clearer and differentiating between consumer and user became necessary. While the giftee consumes the gift or uses the gift, initially it is chosen and bought by the giver. The receiver has a longer relationship with the given item. But the gift-suitable products and services target the giver. Also, more research is done on givers, their decision-making and emotions and less is concentrated on the receiver's emotions or how they decide to act during and after the presenting part of the process. This led to pondering the following question: **Would creating a more active role for the receiver in the gift-giving practice lead to less gift-failure?**

The process of pinpointing one clear and helpful question to guide the research was a difficult process for me and every new finding that initially seemed to bring clarity to the topic ended up leading further into darkness. No approach seemed to support the emergence of a promising solution. Considering the design process itself is rarely straightforward, this tendency was also present in every smaller part of the process including establishing a research question.

## 2.3. Process Methodology

The design process was initially planned on the bases of the Double Diamond model developed by the Design Council in 2004 [13]. What appealed to me about this model is the seemingly linear look to it, which I hoped to use to assess the progress of the process (*Figure 1 Design Process Planning Using the Double Diamond Model*). This doesn't mean that the process is actually linear, it just helps to imagine it as such. As the name says the design process is envisioned as two diamond-shaped rectangles side-by-side. The diverge of the diamond represents exploring a challenge more broadly, while the converge represents taking focused action based on the previous exploration.

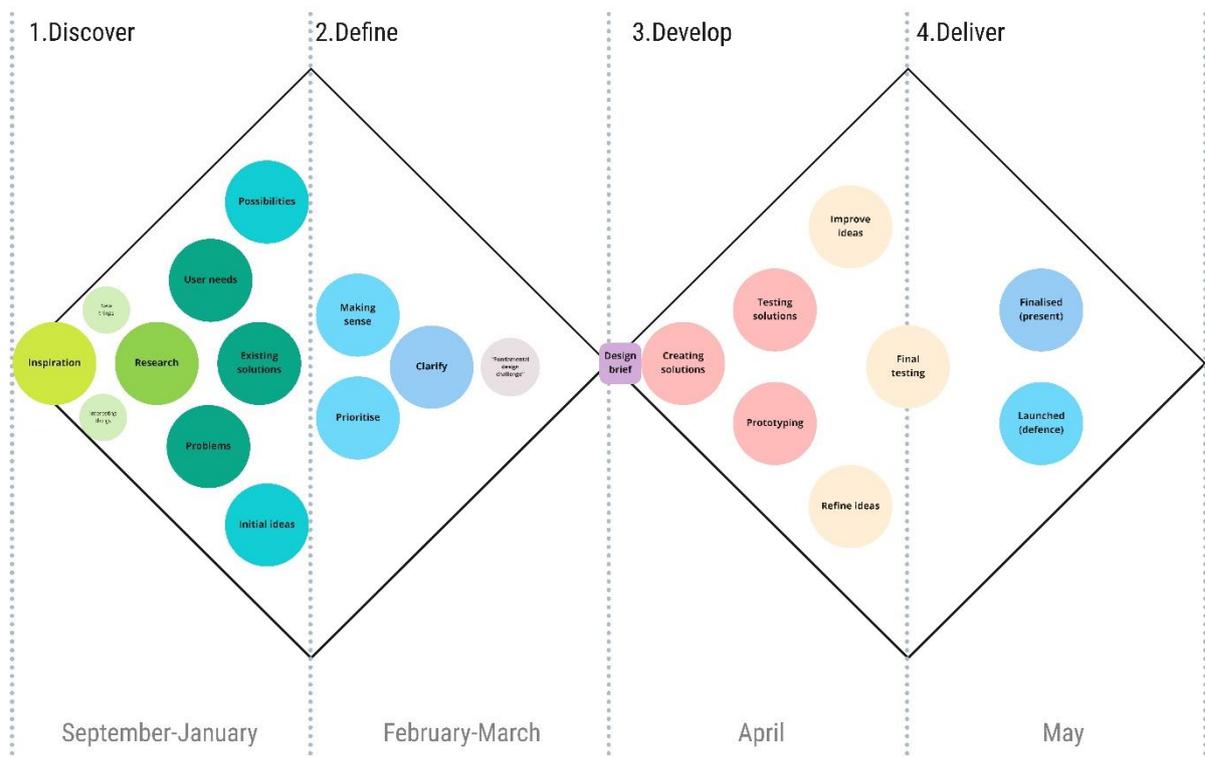


Figure 1 Design Process Planning Using the Double Diamond Model

The two diamonds consist of four phases: Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver.

The Discovery phase is the start of the project and is the time to delve deep into the issue at hand, finding inspiration and new insights. Also getting to know the users and identifying their needs. Initial ideas can also rise in this phase. Chapters 3 and 4 are covered during this phase.

The end of the Definition phase is the first focusing point. The information gathered in the previous phase is organised and prioritised, made sense of and should result in a

clear framing of the fundamental design challenge. The definition phase is covered in chapter 5 and the first diamond is concluded with chapter 6.

The Development phase is for creating solutions, which are prototyped, tested, and iterated. A lot of trial and error is usually seen in this phase. In this case, co-creating sessions conducted with potential users were used to test and develop the proposed concept further and help create user journeys (chapters 7 and 8).

The final Delivery phase is again taking focused action based on the previous quarter leading to a finalised product or service that can be launched. In this case, finalising and defending the thesis can be considered deliverable results.

By the end of the process, however, a more accurate representation of the process can be shown through the Constructive Design Research Model [14]. While I initially had trouble grasping the model and couldn't use it to create an action plan, it seems useful to keep track of the activities and the order in which they occur and which direction they are taking (*Figure 2*).

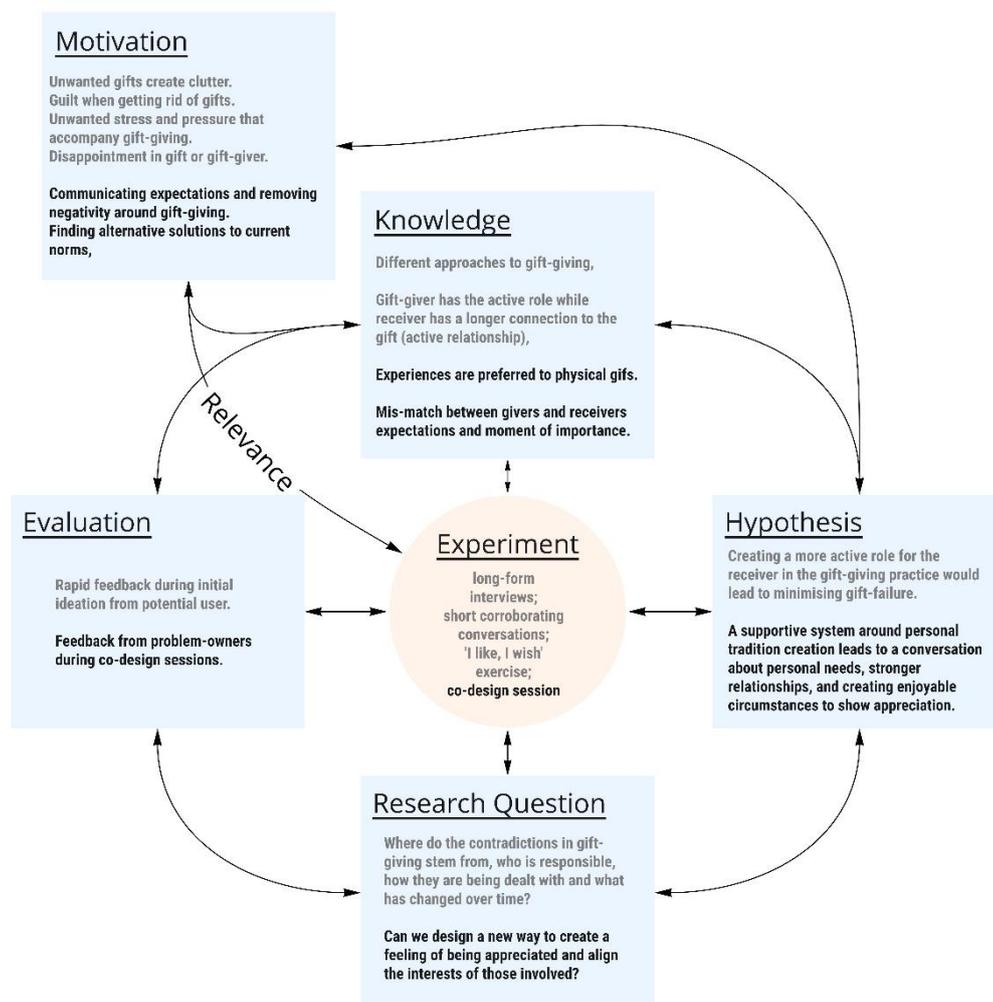


Figure 2 Design Process Represented Through Constructive Design Research Model

## **2.4. Research Methods**

The current project lasted from September 2021 until May 2022, which meant many major holidays fell during that time giving a chance to better observe gift-giving experiences in real-time. The main research process during this process was planned from September until the end of March. In addition to desk research, the main research methods include interviews and observations. Follow-up interviews and feedback sessions were conducted during the development phase in April. This also included the co-design sessions to develop, validate, and improve the concept. Considering the nature of the design process, new information was collected until the end of the project in May.

To understand the psychology and behaviour behind gift-giving I turned to research papers, publication articles, and books. A lot of research has been done into gift-giving from different aspects (i.e., decision-making, expectations, emotional responses, relationships, consequences, in both good and bad experiences). To get an understanding of the shifts that have happened over time a good starting point was Marcel Mauss's analysis of exchanging objects and relationship building between humans covered in his book "The Gift" (originally published in 1925). For understanding people's current mindsets and behavioural shifts happening in the world, opinion articles, tv-interviews, forums, and podcast episodes were looked into. Gift-giving is a very personal subject and seeing and hearing about individual experiences helped to understand the emotions surrounding it and this provided fast insights into changes that are constantly happening. This was also a good way to gain access to a bigger range of research subjects to validate initial assumptions before conducting interviews.

### **2.4.1. Interviews and informal conversations**

Two sets of interviews were conducted. The first ones during the Discovery phase on the topic of gift-giving and the second set at the end of the Defining phase to clarify the fundamental design challenge and focus on a direction for a possible solution.

The first interviews aimed to gather personal experiences, opinions, and feelings about both receiving different types of gifts and about the process of selecting what to give and what leads to giving a good gift. In addition to formal interviews with prepared questions, a lot of insights were gained from spontaneous conversations that happened at random moments. I also noticed that the topic and passionate opinions were available without having to ask. Easily identifying with the topic meant people felt comfortable sharing their thoughts with me, which would have been complicated with a more delicate subject matter. Everybody was happy to share positive memories and took the chance

to vent about frustrating ones. As time went on it became clear that everybody has an opinion on the subject and little neutrality was seen. 20 people participated in this process, 11 of which were formal interviews lasting 1-2 hours. 9 can be considered informal conversations that lasted about half an hour each.

The second round of interviews was conducted while looking into the solution space and concentrated on personal traditions – what people considered to be their traditions, how they started and what keeps them going, what happens during it and when does the switch from a simply recurring activity into tradition happen. 15 interviews were held this time around lasting from 30 minutes to 2 hours.

At the start of the research process, interviews were more thorough, lengthier, and more formal. But as the participants were willing, there was a chance to go back and keep making shorter interviews throughout the research process. Initial interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, or via video call. Follow-up conversations were often in written form. This was useful for getting fast clarifications, feedback, and reassurance about insights gathered and assumptions made during the research process. Some participants took part in both rounds leading to some overlap, in total 29 people shared their experiences during the research interviews.

The interviews aimed to get information that could be analysed and generalised. The personal information of the participants will remain confidential and identifying characteristics (gender, age) are mentioned only when necessary for the example being described.

#### **2.4.2. Observation**

As mentioned, many holidays were celebrated during the research process. Christmas was the biggest of them, but also Halloween, Thanksgiving, New Year, Valentine's Day, Estonian Independence Day, and numerous birthdays including my own. I was paying more attention to my own actions because of the thesis research, but the holidays provided a good opportunity to observe others. Both in public and in my social circles. Additionally, the coverage of the topic in the media, social media, advertisements, and communication from different brands and companies had increased during that time, especially during Christmas and Valentine's Day, providing another source for exploration. This is not extensively covered in this thesis but provided a backdrop for the process, nonetheless.

### **2.4.3. Co-design session**

During the Development phase, the concept was presented to different potential users. A possible user journey was created beforehand and walked through with the participant. They provided feedback on what functions of the concept they would use and how, what is not necessary for them, and what is missing, or out of order. Finally, the adjusted user journey was gone through once more and the participant was asked to assess the emotions they would feel in different steps and would the solution benefit or hinder them in that situation. A conclusion was asked to be made, how the proposed solution made them feel and whether it would be beneficial in their opinion and did their initially set concern get addressed. 3 of these sessions (two in person and one remotely) were held and they each dealt with a different type of problem that the participants had in their current lives (gift-giving, personal traditions, improving relationships). The sessions were used to co-design, develop, improve, and validate the proposed design concept.

### 3. GIFT GIVING

Gift-giving is a longstanding practice with a lot of nuance and emotional attachments to it. A brief overview of the history, types and mindset behind gifts is provided in this chapter. The frequently used terms in the context of this thesis were defined as follows:

**Gift/present** – (noun) *a physical item or a representation of an item voluntarily given from one person or entity to another in order to portray their appreciation without compensation.*

**Gift-giver** – *a person who presents a gift to another person.*

**Giftee/receiver/recipient** – *a person who is receiving a gift from another person*

**Gift-giving/gifting** – *the process of presenting a gift from the gift-giver to the giftee.*

Some words that are used in social contexts and articles (i.e., personal conversations, news articles, and opinion pieces) are not used in this thesis. The exclusion of 'gifting' (as a verb) and 'gifter' is based on the somewhat controversial use of these words. While they seem more specific and concise compared to 'gift-giving' and 'gift-giver', they are also overly used by marketing campaigns creating in some cases negative reactions and a shift from appreciative gesture to an activity that needs to be done. 'To gift' has been used as a verb since the 1500s, but the increased use of gifting started to be noticed around 2014 and not in a good way. The negativity that accompanied the word was traced down to the users of the word, who weren't people talking amongst each other, but brands. Years have passed, and the word is still used but hasn't taken a strong hold in everyday speech, not in the same way 'contact' has made a strong shift from a noun to a verb<sup>3</sup>. When 'giftee' is a word found in dictionaries, the same doesn't apply to 'gifter' (except for unofficial sources such as Wiktionary and Urban Dictionary). An exception can be made for the upcoming section on 'regifting'. The term gained popularity due to an episode from Seinfeld (a popular tv-series at the time) in 1995 and is now found in the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

#### 3.1. History of Gift-giving

Giving presents can be traced back to cavemen, who used stones, tree bark and animal teeth to show their appreciation or gain favour. Even if these days presenting items to others to avoid being killed is not a common occurrence as it was then, the main

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<sup>3</sup> In the 1930's the word contact used to bother people when used as a verb instead as a noun as it was meant to: establishing contact with someone.

intention has remained the same – **to strengthen social connections**. When cavemen initially gifted painted rocks and interesting looking animal teeth for the simple reason to prove their ability to provide for a family, the gifts became more elaborate over time with the development of tools. The simple act of drilling a hole into an animal tooth made it easier to fashion a necklace out of it and display your valuable assets to others. But even before that, gifts were considered precious keepsakes and pride was felt by the receiver and respect was shown by other cavemen to the gift-giver as the act suggested power and success. [15]

The strength of the social connection could also be measured similarly to today. More intricate the stone or rarer the animal bone or tooth, the closer the social connection. That is seen today as we are willing to spend more money on the ones closest to us.

Tribes on the Pacific Northwest coast of the United States and Canada used the traditional *potlatch* to demonstrate the leader's power. The potlatch could be held on occasions of births, deaths, weddings, and other major events. The feast often included music, dancing, games, and storytelling. Gift-giving was a big part of the celebrations, and it seems similar to our current means of celebrating the same occasions, with one big difference. The holder of the potlatch is the one giving presents to their guests. Tribe leaders would use potlatches to verify their status and power. Power can be gained but also weakened if not enough wealth isn't given away. [16]

In Egypt, gifts were given to the dead to aid them in the transition to the afterlife. The wealthier the person the more elaborate and valuable the gifts that were buried with them. However, everyday items were also considered to be helpful in the transition and more modest people were buried with gifts such as food and bowls. The earliest mentioned birthday celebration is over 3400 years old, and it is considered that the Egyptians are the originators of the tradition. The celebrations took place on the day of the pharaoh's coronation. It remained a privilege of the royalty for generations before the tradition reached the common people. [17]

In ancient Greece, gifts were given to loved ones on their day of birth not to celebrate them, but keep evil spirits at bay, who were believed to haunt people on their birthday. A wish to the gods was made to keep them safe and the message was sent by blowing out a candle. [18]

In medieval times birthday celebrations remained the privilege of rulers and saints. Gifts were a way to show support to the leader, the church, and through them, God. It became the norm for common people to provide tokens of appreciation not the other way around as it had been earlier when tribe leaders were sharing their wealth to show

gratitude and power. A dowery was a form of a present that emerged during that time, meaning it was a present from the bride's father to the new husband in the form of livestock or money. A new era of individualism started with Enlightenment and people started to celebrate their own birth more than the birth of their saint. [18]

Technological development, growing manufacturing, urbanisation, and department stores even, made gift-giving more accessible and affordable in the 19th century. Making it possible to give tokens of appreciation to not just the most important people, but to a wider circle of friends, acquaintances, and by now random people you share an office with.

Gift-giving as an activity and the gifts themselves have changed greatly over time. The procedures surrounding the tradition have become less strict. They used to have well-established rules in the community, which everybody knew and adhered to. For example, if you were given a present, you were supposed to reciprocate with a present of equal value or higher. The items were also more precious. There were fewer in circulation and therefore valued more, so they were meant to be passed on and enjoyed by more people and not to be kept to oneself for too long. [16] Now the rules have become vague, the world has become smaller and more open. Different cultures are no longer in just one region, they travel. Knowing all the rituals and superstitions in the world that surround gift-giving seems impossible. And even then, personal preferences and beliefs create complexity on top of that.

Gift-giving has developed an obligatory trait. The feeling that you should give something back, upon receiving a present. This has also been the case, but as mentioned, the rules are vaguer now and a sense of obligation is felt even without the communication of an actual obligation [19]. The expectation of reciprocity has remained throughout history and is seen during today's most popular gift-giving holiday, Christmas when Santa Claus has a list of kids that deserve a reward in exchange for their good behaviour.

### **3.1.1. Rituals and traditions**

Superstitions surrounding gifts can be found around the world. In Estonia, among other places, there are beliefs such as a watch being an inappropriate gift because it symbolises time running out, a mirror is unsuitable because the receiver's soul will get stuck in it, and an empty wallet will bring poverty. These superstitions are losing their influence over time, but there are still people who might get offended by such objects.

During Chinese New Year it is customary in some Asian countries to exchange presents in the form of envelopes with cash between friends and family for the coming year to bring them good fortune. However, the envelope must be red, because that is a lucky

colour, and the amount must be even because even numbers are favourable, but the amount can't have a four in it, because that is unlucky. These envelopes evolved from coins strung together by red string and have now become popular in a digital version [20]. In a way, strong traditions and superstitions can help the gift-giving process by reducing the choices and uncertainty-induced anxiety [21]. There is no question about what colour envelope to choose and deciding on an amount becomes about 63 per cent easier.<sup>4</sup>

Housewarming parties have remained popular to this day, but they got started from the actual need to warm a house. Friends and neighbours brought over firewood, installed the hook to hang a pot over the fire and after giving the hosts warmth and the capability to cook, the meal was shared as a community [22]. Now bringing food and drinks is considered appropriate or a wish list is used for the occasion. There is always the chance that new homeowners once again become burdened by unwanted items after the decluttering that usually happens during a moving process. Or in some cases friendships can end, when principles clash and guests aren't willing to adhere to the provided wish list (personal communication, October 2021). This is leading away from the true value of the housewarming party, which is gathering together, celebrating a new chapter in life, and sharing a good time with the community.

Wrapping the item can be as important in some cultures as the present itself. Japanese gift-wrapping technique is called Furoshiki cloth is used for wrapping instead of paper. A lot of rules go together with this practice and in some cases, the gift-giver's feelings could be interpreted from the wrapping [23]. The use of Furoshiki declined for a while when plastic bags became popular, but it is being used more and more all around the world. It is being promoted as an ecologically responsible wrapping method, as the cloth is reusable, in opposition to the excessive use of wrapping paper during Christmas for example in the United States [24].

Christmas is the biggest gift-giving holiday in the world. Giving gifts during that time in the Christian tradition can be traced to the Three Wise Men presenting the very first gifts to newly born Jesus. Other religions have similar celebration customs that fall around the same time. And before that in Ancient Rome, nuts, candles, and wine were given as gifts to each other in December during Saturnalia, a seven-day festival celebrating the god Saturn. [25] While Christmas is often depicted as a cosy holiday to be spent with family, it has also become the holiday when most money is spent [26] and more people are starting to rethink their stance on the traditions [27]. Being that

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<sup>4</sup> Considering that commonly the gifted amount in a red envelope is between 18 to 200 dollars.

gift-giving is a big part of Christmas tradition, new trends and opportunities can emerge from this shift.

## **3.2. Types of Gifts**

Gifts come in a variety of forms and not all of them are tangible. Material, hybrid, and virtual options were looked into, and reception and appreciation of the different types was explored.

### **3.2.1. Material gifts**

Objects to be kept in the recipient's possession can be considered material gifts according to Chan and Mogilner (2017) [28]. The first gifts ever given, stones and bones, would fall into that category. Some bigger items in history include The Statue of Liberty, which was a gift from France to the United States and Hanno the White Elephant, gifted by King Manuel I of Portugal to Pope Leo X [29].

These days personal keepsakes are generally less valued, and gifts are becoming more elaborate and extravagant [30]. Instead of being pleasantly surprised by a small token, extensive wish lists are created. Evolving technology and commercialisation diminished the popularity of hand-made gifts in the 1990s making mass-produced items the preferred choice. By then adults were giving each other more lavish gifts that tended to be impractical and in the 2000s children's wish lists started to look similar to their parents' including cell phones and gaming consoles. However, exhaustion from consumerism is growing, which in a way is leading back to appreciating handmade items [31, 32].

### **3.2.2. Experiential gifts**

Experiential gifts are considered events that the recipient lives through. Concert tickets, skydiving, lessons, and procedures can fall under this category. Research shows that experiences bring more satisfaction compared to possessions because they are more likely done with others. Recipients tend to appreciate living through experiences more than using material gifts as they elicit stronger emotional responses during that time. Also, positive gift-giving experiences strengthen social relationships and Cindy Chan and Cassie Mogilner (2017) go even as far as recommending choosing to give an experience rather than a material gift when wanting to improve a relationship. [28]

### **3.2.3. Giving time**

One's time can be gifted by joining someone in the activity they received as a present or offering to do an activity for or instead of the recipient (babysitting for example), to

provide the recipient free time of their own. People also feel they have more time when they are spending time on others, so in this instance, both the gift giver and receiver have a higher chance of enjoying the gift [33]. Volunteering also falls in this category in a way, except the gift is mostly for strangers. Donating an organ, while being a mix of a donation and a material gift, can also be considered a gift of one's time due to the time it takes to prepare and recuperate from the procedure. Giving time instead of material gifts is gaining more attention recently, with more and more articles emerging on the subject and services to support that, for example, a campaign by Visit Estonia with the help of a gift generator helps the user find a suitable option for an experience and purchase a gift card for the activity [34].

### **3.2.4. Donations**

Spending the Christmas present budget on a charity or donating in someone's name has become more popular in recent years. It can be well-received when a big company opts out of giving their employees another random item with a logo and instead supports a cause. The impact is bigger because the amount of money that goes into the gift isn't in small fragments like in the case of employee gifts. Making donations in someone's name can be successful when the cause is attached to the receiver, not the giver. But it can be disappointing when the donation feels impersonal. This underwhelming reception has been seen almost twenty years ago in an episode of Friends and ten years ago in a stand-up comedy show where Ricky Gervais was discussing a goat that was given to an African family in his name. Receivers appreciate socially responsible gifts less than anticipated by the giver, especially when in a weaker social relationship [35]. Another form of donation can be buying a one-for-one item, meaning when purchasing the item, one of the same items or something else is donated to a cause or someone in need.

### **3.2.5. Regifting**

Regifting can be considered taboo in many countries. and the thought of it can put a lot of stress on the receiver of the unwanted gift. On one hand, they are worried about offending the gift-giver and on the other, the person to who they want to pass that item along. Research shows that the worry is mostly unwarranted, as the givers don't get offended over regifting their gift as much as the receivers expect. Especially when the item can go to someone who truly appreciates it. Having a National Regifting Day (celebrated on the 17th of December in the United States) also helped receivers feel more allowed to pass their present along. [36] Michael Norton in general believes that regifting would be beneficial for all and help a lot of unwanted items find an appreciative owner [37].

### **3.2.6. Digital, virtual, and analogue gifts**

Online gifts have gained momentum during the pandemic, with the searches for the term rising 80% in 2020 compared to the previous year. Searches for gift cards have increased 100% globally according to Google. [38] There is also a rise in recommendation lists for digital and virtual gifts. These terms seem to be used interchangeably. However, virtual suggests something that doesn't actually exist. A digital gift is something that can be used with a device. All the streaming service subscriptions, online cooking classes, personal trainer appointments, and educational courses can be considered digital. These things can be fully done online, but they do exist.

The line gets blurry when buying a gift card or voucher online, but the activity is happening away from the computer. A hiking trip or a massage appointment for example. Digital methods were used by the gift giver, but the receiver gets an analogue gift. The same goes for physical subscriptions arriving at the receiver's mailbox monthly, like a subscription of flowers or a year's worth of socks<sup>5</sup>. Virtual reality is still not common in everyday use, but that would be the place for virtual gifts. Virtual accessories and garments have moved from video games to fashion week, it is possible to buy virtual land and real estate [39].

There's another type of gift that actually exists but feels virtual and the odds are it remains out of reach and unseen. This type includes naming a star, buying land on the Moon, or in Scotland to be titled Lord or Lady, and adoption of an exotic animal in a zoo.<sup>6</sup>

### **3.3. Psychology of Gifts**

Definition of a gift is a thing that is given willingly to someone without payment. But when looking at Marcel Mauss' anthropological research [16], it seems that gifts are more binding than they appear, bringing along obligations, a reciprocal relationship, and a duty to someone else. David Cheal, however, finds gifts to cement social relationships and increase solidarity in the everyday world that consists of friends and family but, at the same time, economically redundant. Meaning that spending money on others' behalf is not an efficient way to spend resources or gain favour. [40]

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<sup>5</sup> In Estonia food subscriptions aren't widely popular, however, there is a possibility to gift someone a year's worth of socks delivered once a month.

<sup>6</sup> Naming a star, buying a title or land or adopting animals can be used as gifts that are never actually claimed.

### **3.3.1. Givers**

Gift givers tend to believe that gifts should be less practical and more desirable. People, in general, are more willing to buy practical things for themselves, but often feel that they can't afford nice things. Wanting to give things that are desirable in their eyes, can lead to picking items that the recipient won't find a use for. Either they are difficult to use, very specific and meant for something that comes up rarely. [41]

Givers also imagine the delight this desirable gift brings to the receiver upon opening the gift. The gift exchange is the guaranteed occasion when the giver can witness the recipient's connection to the gotten item. It is the one chance to see the outcome of the intention the giver had when choosing the item. Especially when the item is more desirable than feasible. Givers also tend to choose gifts that can be handed over, this can mean more affordable options instead of a deposit towards a higher quality model.

People also tend to choose material gifts over experiential gifts. One of the reasons for that could be that experiential gifts require more knowledge about the recipient.

Givers also believe they have to surprise the recipient, which can lead them to pick unrequested gifts, even if there is a specific wish list available. A higher price, showing knowledge about the recipient, and the amount of effort that goes into the gift choosing process, is also believed to be important to the recipient by the giver. [41]

### **3.3.2. Receivers**

While the gift giver feels excitement in the expectation of the recipient's reaction when opening the present, receivers can feel a mixture of excitement and anxiety. In the best-case scenario, true joy can be shown upon seeing the gift, or a display of gratitude must be concocted to hide the disappointment [42]. Receivers find more joy in gifts that are useful and not necessarily fun. Gift recipients have a more concrete relationship with the gifted item, they are the ones who have to use it. Recipients are also willing to be patient to receive their high-quality gift, meaning they don't mind getting a down payment or a smaller contribution towards a bigger item. Recipients find high-quality products more thoughtful. [43] Recipients also find more happiness in experiential gifts rather than material items, because more often events can be experienced with others. [28] Experiential gifts are also often used after some time of the exchange, prolonging the positive feeling of the gift. Recipients also find requested gifts more favourable and don't care about the surprise aspect of the process. When it comes to gift cards, they prefer variety over specificity, even if it is to their favourite store or brand. Because recipients also appreciate the longevity of a gift, choices that are overly personal or based on their unique traits have a shorter sense of satisfaction. While charitable gifts

like donations are in theory seen as good gifts [44], recipient's feeling of ownership is reduced, as is their enthusiasm towards the gift. [41]

### 3.3.3. Differences

People becoming more individualistic is a global phenomenon. This also means uniqueness is valued more and at the same time, people are categorising themselves more freely. [45] Awareness and conversation around different types of people have increased, whether it be based on personality traits, values, or lifestyle.

Some examples of popular personality types used are the extraversion trait scale from the Big Five Traits (BFT) [46] and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which was initially based on C. G. Jung's psychological types. The current version of MBTI uses reworked dimensions of the aforementioned Big Five Traits model [47]. The Myers-Briggs' introspective self-report is presented in a colourful package unlike other personality tests and is free for users, which they say is important to get a wider test group for research. It is not widely endorsed by academic research and has been criticised as pseudoscience, but 20 million people still use it every year, with one of the draws being connecting to others on common grounds [48]. For example, the popularity of MBTI is also backed by the emergence of dating and friend-finding apps using it for matching up their users, after the users themselves started using the MBTI as a description on their profiles<sup>7</sup>. A simpler, but also popular categorisation in use is based on the extraversion scale of the BFT, meaning people identify themselves as introverts or extraverts. Another popular theory, but not considered scientific, is the Five Love Languages, the premise being that different personalities give and receive love differently. Gift-giving is considered one of the love languages [49].

I bring up theories that lack strong scientific support because, despite that, they are widely used by people in social situations. If people take the test and recognise themselves in the assigned MBTI type, it gives them a chance to create a shorthand with like-minded people. They can provide a lot of information about themselves using one word or just seemingly random four letters<sup>8</sup>. Same with mentioning a love language they identify with. This has evolved from the five original ones to people coming up with their own and sharing them on social media. However, communication around these

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<sup>7</sup> [Birdy](#), [So Syncd](#), and [Boo](#) are some of the newer ones, while already popular dating sites with a long history have integrated the personality types feature as well.

<sup>8</sup> The Myers-Briggs [personality types](#) are divided into four groups based on people's goals and interests (Analysts, Diplomats, Sentinels, and Explorers) which in turn have four [strategy types](#) each (e.g., Advocate, Mediator, Protagonist, Campaigner). Instead of the type names, people tend to use the acronyms more, which come from five personality aspects measured on a scale (e.g., ISTJ, ENFP, plus an A or T at the end).

identifiers only works when people accept the results of the personality tests. If they disagree, then someone trying to convince them of characteristics they should have can lead to weakening the connection. And in that case, the lack of scientific proof can be useful to disregard the other's accusations.

Categorising oneself based on values can be affected by beliefs around environmental awareness, religion, cultural traditions, past experiences, or even just personal preferences. Restrictions on eating habits or other health-related topics can be very personal but have a significant impact on personal identification and social interactions. Veganism, for example, being a value-, preference-, or restriction-based categorisation can still be a controversial topic in many situations, which a person might not want to discuss further.

The rise of anti-consumerism has led to the popularisation of minimalism, decluttering, van-living, tiny houses, and digital nomadism [50, 51, 52]. On the other hand, luxury living and maximalism haven't gone anywhere. Lifestyle choices aren't always voluntary. They can be affected by outside circumstances or medical conditions. Hoarding can lead to living as a maximalist and obsessive compulsive spartanism can look like extreme minimalism.<sup>9</sup>

Even when some categorisations of people might not have scientific merit or the interest of researchers, peoples' actions and choices can provide indicators of the popularity and usefulness of type-identifications. While people wish to remain individualistic and unique, they still wish to share their uniqueness with others, who would likely appreciate and support their type of individualism. People also enjoy learning more about themselves, feeling of belonging, and simplified ways to understand others [53]. This stronger understanding of self also leads to less contentment when receiving gifts.

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<sup>9</sup> Hoarding is characterised by an ongoing resistance to discarding belongings, even items without value. Obsessive compulsive spartanism is also known as compulsive decluttering and is considered a pattern of obsessive-compulsive disorder, described as an excessive desire to throw away of items in ones' home or living area.

## **4. GIFT-RELATED ISSUES**

The research into the current problem space aimed to find the contradictions in the gift-giving process. To do that, data available on the subject was combined with information gathered from research interviews to explore where do the contradictions stem from, who is responsible, how they are being dealt with and what has changed over time?

### **4.1. The Discord Between Giver and Receiver**

Based on the research, it seems one source of conflict in the gift-giving process is gift-givers focusing on the moment of exchange, while the receivers tend to value the ownership of the gift. Meaning when choosing a gift, and when in doubt, givers measure the value of the item by the likelihood of receiving a visible reaction from the recipient – a smile [54]. This quest for a reaction leads to biased decision-making, even when they know the recipients' preferences. According to described experiences, those on the receiving end value the exchange far less and can be even ridden with anxiety due to the attention this activity brings. Givers can get anxious when they feel they might fail to bring joy with their choice. [55] This might be leading givers to make choices that are not preferable to receivers and forcing the receivers to cope with the unwanted gift by concealing, disclosing, or re-evaluating their feelings. Other reasons for gift failure can come from the recipient feeling pitied, an obligation for reciprocation, or having high expectations. [42]

Receivers are more pleased to get gifts that are not for specific occasions and therefore can be a surprise [56], however when it comes to requested gifts for certain occasions, receivers appreciate the surprise gift less than the requested one. There is more research done about the givers' thought process and motivation, probably because they are the decision-maker in this process and the recipient has a more passive role. Especially when showing disappointment about the gift is considered inappropriate, the recipients often turn to concealing their emotions and just making peace with the unwanted gift [42].

### **4.2. Lack of Unified Action**

According to Jennifer Rothschild, the reason for bad gifts is approaching the three parts of the process (intention, object, and effect) as three separate actions instead of one unified action and this leads to a bad gift experience. When concentrating more on one of the parts provides a higher chance of getting that one solved exceptionally well, but at the same time means that two-thirds of the gift are likely to be underestimated or a failure. However, the unified action doesn't only mean that all the parts should be

considered, but the intention, object and effect are based on one already existing shared experience is something that creates the desired outcome. [57]

Approaching the decision making is illustrated by examples using experiences described in the interviews as inspiration. Each of the following examples has a different starting point – intention, object, or effect.

- 1. Starting with a good intention** – an employer has a new young employee who they are very happy with. She has been with the company only for a year, but contributed in important ways during that time, and the employer wishes to show how much she is appreciated; words don't seem enough. So far there is a tradition of presenting an engraved glass trophy on the 5th anniversary that the manager really liked at her old workplace, and everybody here has always seemed to like it as well. Times have changed, and people change jobs faster, so they decide to make an exception and do it after one year. To truly show appreciation, a company-wide meeting is called, and it is presented in front of everybody, so she would see the support and emphasise the exception that was made in honour of her. The young employee however didn't feel the appreciation. She doesn't like being in the centre of attention (that's why she chose to be an analyst to offer quiet support to her team). She also recently moved on her own, to a small place. But growing up in a big house where every shelf was filled with items and nothing was ever allowed to be thrown away, she developed an aversion to clutter and decided to have only necessary things in her home, and things that she associates with warm memories. The glass trophy isn't useful and the only thing she remembers when looking at it is the negativity she was feeling while receiving it and the eye-rolls from other older employees, who commented on how they had to wait for so long for this.
- 2. Starting with an object** – A couple got a gift card for a spa vacation from their parents. The spa was in another city, hours away, which made it feel even more like a vacation. The woman really enjoyed the whole experience: the facility was beautiful, the massages were enjoyable, and it was nice to get away from home. She wanted someone else to experience the place as well. It was a bit too expensive of a gift to give to a friend, who she was sure would like it. But her sister's birthday was coming up, and she didn't have anything for her, so she decided to get her sister and her partner the same gift card she had gotten. At the birthday party, she hands over the gift, while adding "I know you don't like spas, but maybe you will change your mind". The sister however is more of a homebody and doesn't enjoy overnight trips. And even if they take a trip, she likes to be in control of choosing the destination herself (after thorough research

and going through feedback from others). Also, the pair never visits public pools, nor do they enjoy swimming that much. The partner has a bad back, so he visits a masseuse regularly, but it took him a while to find someone he liked and didn't make his condition worse. They feel pressure when accepting the gift because they can't imagine enjoying it, and also a bit of a disappointment because it is not the first time hearing "I know you don't like it but..."

**3. Starting with the effect** – Tom sees his friend exhausting himself with work and he wants to cheer him up. They haven't spent much time together lately and it feels like his friend doesn't have time to chat even. He knows it is temporary, that the friend is working toward an important deadline. They have been wanting to go to a certain festival for years and tickets become available. Tom knows this would make his friend very happy, so he buys the tickets and also plans the trip, as the festival is abroad. It is months away, so surely, he will have time for this by then, Tom thinks. He surprises his friend with the tickets and tells him all about the plans and how, he doesn't have to worry about anything, all is taken care of, and he can just relax and enjoy a well-earned vacation. Tom was right, the friend is extremely happy about the tickets and moved by his friend's care for him. But when starting to talk about the plans more, something doesn't add up. The work deadline had been pushed and now it falls on the exact date of the festival. There is no way to get out of it and it seems the trip won't be possible after all. But for a moment, Tom brought real joy to his friend.

In each case, some aspects worked well, and certain goals were achieved. A good intention started the process, a great experience got shared, and a joyous response was gained. But a higher chance to give a good gift is when all three aspects are covered at the same time. An example of a unified action would include noticing a need or preference of the other person during time spent together, that is also relevant to the shared time, and the object that satisfies the need also emerges during said time.

### **4.3. Obligations and Reciprocation**

Obligations came up in the interview process in different contexts. Most mentioned was the feeling of obligation to gift something for an occasion because it felt expected and a polite thing to do. Another type of obligation was felt when receiving a gift. Instead of feeling only joy as a receiver, the moment was dampened by the instant sense of pressure to give something back [19]. On one occasion the value of the gift added to the pressure because it wasn't just the pressure to reciprocate, but also it had to match the worth of the received gift. It wasn't that the item received wasn't appreciated. It was exactly what was wished for, and it also came as a pleasant surprise, but this just

shows that there are many aspects to this seemingly simple process of gift-giving and even if it is approached as a unified action, which it was in the case mentioned. The intention was to show that the other person is heard and that the time spent together is appreciated. The object reflected it because it was established information between the two parties, and the effect was achieved by bringing the receiver a small surprise and joy. Unfortunately, it wasn't determined if the pressure of reciprocity was fleeting or remains with the gifted object until today, years later.

The third type of obligation occurred when using the gift itself. Gift cards were the example that was referenced most in this context. They have a time pressure which varies in length, which provides flexibility but usually, it also is long enough that they can be forgotten. Or what also emerged as a pattern: the week before the next birthday was spent using up all the gift cards gotten the year before. While it could be spread out over the year and in a way experience the celebration throughout the year, that seemed rarely to be the case. It was also suggested: "The gift cards should come with reminders to use them and notifications of the upcoming due date." I have also been blamed for one gift card going to waste because I didn't remind the person to use it in time. I didn't feel guilty however, in my mind once you hand over a gift, you hand over your responsibility with it.

#### **4.4. Level of Relationship**

Knowing the other person makes coming up with a gift idea a lot easier. But if the effort of getting to know the person isn't made, knowing the person for a long time isn't enough. And it can work against the giver when they use information learned years ago without considering how the other person has possibly changed during the time since. An example from my personal experience would be someone giving me a box of chocolate candy (Geisha) with the comment "I remember you used to like these". That might have been the case at some point, but for the last couple of years, I had stayed away from any dairy products, including milk chocolate candy, because I was diagnosed with lactose intolerance. The other person was aware of it but was instead guided by the fact that she had known for a longer time.

It is also possible that people that have known each other for a long time, like spouses, assume they know everything about the other person, and they can predict or assume things correctly about them. In some cases, new friends can be more successful without the background knowledge, when they can view the person in the current moment more clearly. People change over time and getting to know them over and over again throughout the relationship leads to a better understanding of what brings the other person joy and why. In one instance a woman asked for a pair of earrings for her

birthday. She got exactly the ones she asked for and was very happy and grateful to her partner for paying attention and listening to her. The next year came around and she got another pair of earrings from the same designer. And the year after that once again she received another pair. She understood that the assumption her partner made was that she likes everything that the one designer makes and also that earrings are always a good idea. The joy was now replaced with deep disappointment and a bit of anger even, thinking "... does he know me at all?" This particular situation was solved by talking it through and providing explanations. In some cases, the recipient might not have the heart or courage to tell the other person they frankly don't like what they are receiving. Or in worse cases, they are not taken seriously or just ignored when they decide to say something. This can start from one successful gift, or an assumption based on a small detail that snowballs. For example, having one figurine at home must mean you like figurines. You get another one from someone, then another, and before you know it you have a collection of figurines, things you don't really like.

People's examples included constantly getting bird-themed gifts because ornithology was their hobby or getting literature on software development because they worked in IT. A 29-year-old woman recalls mentioning once at a family gathering, that she liked dolphins. After that, she started getting dolphin figurines and other dolphin related items every year. Mostly from one aunt but sometimes from other relatives and friends as well who assumed based on her growing collection that it must be a good idea. She was 10 when it first started. She still likes dolphins but remembers thinking after three or four years, that it is enough now, all the shelves are full, and she doesn't want any more dolphin memorabilia. The gifts finally stopped a couple of years ago when her aunt passed away.

However, it is possible that basing a decision on an assumption has a happy ending. In one example, once again including the Geisha chocolate, a woman started receiving a Geisha chocolate bar from her mother for every occasion that was even slightly special. "It started with me buying a lot of Geisha bars because I wanted to take part in their raffle. People didn't know it and just thought "wow, you really must like it". Which I actually do as well, it is my favourite. Since then, my mother has given me a Geisha chocolate on every possible "special" occasion, even the more random ones like Women's Day or Valentine's Day, and now it has become a tradition of ours. It's a bit funny because it makes me feel like a kid, kids usually get candy on such occasions. But also, it is sweet because sweets, and food, in general, feel like a quintessential sign of being taken care of. And Geisha especially feels kind of luxurious or indulgent."

## **4.5. Cost and Resources**

When it comes to gift-giving and even most other areas in life, the price can be a sensitive subject. Surprisingly not only the lack of resources and decision making from the gift-givers side but considering cost also turned out to be a sore subject from the receiver's end. In a common situation when a person is asked what they wish to get as a present, answering might not be as straightforward. In one example a woman was struggling to think of a wish that would fit the giver's budget. Even if it is stipulated that anything can be named, people still want to be considerate and not be a burden or a source of guilt for those who embark on fulfilling the wish. This can also create a situation where a similar item that is more affordable is chosen, thinking it will have the same result. The request may be seen more superficially than it is and a lot more effort went into the thought and selection process than the givers assume.

Also, an issue arises when the ask is left open-ended. This is typical at weddings, where the request "the gift should fit in an envelope" reads on the invitation. One interviewee said that he still, after attending a fair number of weddings, struggles to know what the appropriate amount would be. The first thought might be that it can never be too much, but as mentioned, money is a sensitive subject and an inappropriate price for a gift can be felt as offensive and crossing a line.

## **4.6. Restrictions and Constraints**

In addition to cost, information, knowledge, taste, relationships, and rules can negatively restrict the gift-giving process. A typical issue can be, just not knowing what to get. It might be that the person is a new friend or even a stranger and not much is known about them which complicates the decision. In some cases, old friends can also be a mystery or just not having the exact information about what the other person already owns or is missing. This is usually easily solved by asking the right questions, turning to people that might have the answers, or trying to get to know them a little better. In some cases, there might be resistance because the surprise factor is important to the receiver, or they can be adamant that "the other person should just know what to get them on their own".

Specific taste as described by receivers, or pickiness, as described by givers, is another restriction that can be a complication. After years of trying to get a gift right, and time after time seeing a disappointing reaction from the recipient, it might turn the initially good intentions into a tiresome burden, which often leads to opting for impersonal gifts such as gift cards or cash. However, having specific taste might be useful when

answering the yearly “what do you want?” question. There is a bigger chance of success when having a wish-list and existing ideas which can be passed on [58].

Other restricting situations brought up were events organised or gifts given as a group when the group consisted of strangers. This is done with more expensive gifts or often for baby showers and bachelor/bachelorette parties. It is more difficult to navigate in such groups, when people have a different level of relationship with the person being celebrated, in addition to personal resources, beliefs, and preferences.

I found that having constraints can be beneficial to reducing indecision and stress in general. I also noticed the excitement in some cases. In this context I consider constraints to be a set of rules or boundaries that are created together in a group when celebrating together or exchanging gifts. Secret Santa can be considered in this category – everybody draws a name and gives a present to that person. It is a commonly used practice but can be agreed upon as a group, setting additional guidelines for theme, budget, or categories. For example, one family is using Secret Santa for the adults during Christmas but has different rules for the children. Another similar gift exchange practice with more elaborate rules is the White Elephant party. This is considered more of a game and the rules include not having a specific person to bring the gift for and having the possibility to steal a gift from someone else. In one instance the game ended with deeply hurt feelings and a strained relationship with a co-worker when missing out on a pair of coffee mugs.

Other examples of constraints that came up in interviews:

- A group of four girlfriends choose one item every year that they each get for their birthday from the other three. The item is something that they all appreciate and want, preferably something they wouldn't buy for themselves. Even when they know what they are getting, it still creates a positive experience and looking forward to their turn.
- One family decided on a category that the gifts would be in – games. This worked well because the whole family enjoys games, and the effort was truly appreciated when the receiver felt it wasn't just a random board game but something that was specifically picked for their personality and likes after thorough consideration and research.

Restrictions and constraints are essentially very similar. A restriction is a limiting condition or measure, and a constraint is something that imposes a limit or a restriction. I decided to differentiate because these limiting conditions described above had very

different outcomes, from tightening family bonds to ending friendships. And constraining a situation seems to have more positive effects and a possibility to alleviate pressure while adding restrictions limits freedom and increases pressure.

#### **4.7. Additional Aspects of Gift-giving**

Considering the feedback, cases that stood out most emotionally weren't tied to physical objects or even specific experiences that were possibly happening in the future. Or at least the main component of the gratification of the gift didn't come from the object itself. When it came down to it the most appreciation was shown towards the act of the other person noticing and paying attention. One response was: "it is the natural timing of gifts that I appreciate, when it makes sense, not when it is a specific occasion." Another appreciated the attention paid during everyday life activities and making a note of something, leading to a gift later in the year. It was appreciated because it was exactly what they wanted, but also with the extra warmth of feeling heard and taken seriously by a loved one.

Still, the sentiment of noticing and paying attention needs a catalyst (an artefact) that can carry it. But is there a way to increase the impact of the sentiment without increasing the importance of physical objects? Would there be a way to pair the act of appreciation with something more similar to a painted rock rather than the latest technology and get a higher emotional reward from it? Preferably for all participants.

Being included and belonging to something is a fundamental motivation for people [59]. So, it isn't surprising that small traditions that accompanied celebrations and gift-giving were highly valued and even carried on for generations. Celebrating a birthday is a tradition that most of the world shares, however the smaller traditions or rituals that go along with it can vary. Culturally but also individually. Traditions with the family, partner, or just by oneself don't have to be elaborate to be effective and can but don't have to include gifts. But as time was also described as a cherished gift, just spending time together can also be considered in this category.

#### **4.8. Overview of Gift-related Issues**

Gift giving as a **meaningful gesture** of appreciation has over time changed into something obligatory, stressful, unpleasant, and even aggravating. Instead of **showing appreciation** by exchanging gifts, the pressure of norms and expectations is creating a process where neither participant is enjoying themselves. It is starting to feel like a chore instead of the **voluntary** expression of care that it is supposed to be.

Automated consumer actions combined with products and services that promote convenience and efficiency might be an appealing solution for the gift giver, but maybe in this case effort is a good thing. While thoughts behind a gift aren't visible, time and effort are more noticeable for the giftee. This can be recognised from the care that has gone into wrapping the item, by the excitement in someone's voice while telling the chosen item's backstory or taking note of a wish mentioned in passing and presenting it months later. It is the thought and effort that goes into the process that can make the giftee **feel seen, heard**, and appreciated for who they are.

The discord in expectations arises from misjudgement of the importance of certain aspects in the gift-giving process, mostly from the giver's side. Givers tend to put more emphasis on the moment of exchange while receivers appreciate the experience they will have while using the item. "Get them something you would like." or "It's the thought that counts." are recurring well-meaning recommendations that givers hear during decision making that can lead to gift failure. Listening to the first one might lead to emphasising the giver's needs over the recipient's and following the second can create thoughtless and unwanted items, that were purchased only to tick a box – "At least I got them something". The dissonance could be eased, and gift failure minimised, by supporting clearer **communication** around what is **expected** and what is **preferred** by the recipient increasing the giver's decision-making skills.

The following chart gives an overview of issues that are related to gift-giving. Based on previous research and my interviews, the issues were categorised into six bigger categories. A possible situation description and quotes to exemplify are added to each category (*Table 1*).

Issue	Situation Description	Example quote
<b>Social norms and the sense of obligation</b>	Social norms dictate polite behaviour in a specific situation, that others around are adhering to.	<i>"...it doesn't feel right to show up empty-handed." "...well, a guy should always have something in their hands when visiting a woman."</i>
	Obligated to get a gift because of an occasion or because the rest of the group is doing so.	<i>"I always say instead of flowers, bring me socks, if you HAVE to bring anything, it's more practical."</i>
	Social media is full of images of people receiving gifts for a holiday.	<i>"Valentine's Day isn't usually a big deal for me but seeing others on social media makes me feel guilty for not celebrating."</i>
	Being given something. Getting a gift for no apparent reason or not	<i>"When I receive a gift, I automatically feel the pressure of giving something back."</i>

	during a specific occasion.	<i>"They brought my baby a present out of the blue, which reminded me that I hadn't gotten their children anything."</i>
<b>Resources</b>	<p>Not being able to afford what they would like to gift.</p> <p>The price is inappropriate for the occasion.</p> <p>Desirable items are expensive, and it feels inappropriate to ask for them.</p>	<p><i>"I would buy us all a manor if I had the money..."</i></p> <p><i>"The toy is too expensive to get at a random time. I bought it, but I have to wait now for a couple of months until their birthday."</i></p> <p><i>"I know what I want, but I don't want to ask for anything too expensive from them, I don't know their budget."</i></p>
<b>Level of relationship</b>	<p>Not knowing the other person well enough to know what they like.</p> <p>Not knowing what the other person already has.</p>	<p><i>"I remember my mother getting boxes of chocolates from her patients daily... it was nice at first, but at some point, what are you going to with all of them, you don't want to eat that anymore..."</i></p> <p><i>"You can know what they like, but there is still the chance of giving them something that they already have."</i></p>
	<p>Making appropriate choices for people who aren't that close.</p> <p>Expecting the other person know what is wanted without asking.</p>	<p><i>"One of our foreign colleagues got a towel with an "inappropriate" picture. They were embarrassed and angry and left without their gift."</i></p> <p><i>"My dad always asks us what we want, but my mother refuses to answer, saying that he should know by now."</i></p>
<b>Personal beliefs</b>	<p>Superstitious beliefs around an item.</p> <p>Considering a category of items as acceptable or not acceptable.</p>	<i>"My mom doesn't mind if she gets these things, but she tries to avoid giving things that might be considered bad luck. She also doesn't like home goods as a gift, it is not for her, it's for the house."</i>
<b>Conflict between expectation and reaction</b>	<p>The received gift doesn't meet expectations.</p> <p>Inappropriate level of reaction during the gift exchange.</p>	<p><i>"... it was the right thing, but the colour was wrong."</i></p> <p><i>"My sister always blames me for not being excited enough..."</i></p>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<p>Receiving an item, already owned.</p> <p>Receiving an unwanted item.</p>	<i>"Me, my mom, and my brother get the same thing from my dad, a book and a blanket. By now only my brother opens the gift, asks us if we want it, and takes our unopened gifts straight to the Uuskasutuskeskus."</i>

Table 1 Categories, Situational Descriptions, and Experiential Examples of Gift-Giving Related Issues

## 5. SOLUTIONS TO GIFT-RELATED ISSUES

Physical gifts have been the most visible manifestation of displaying appreciative emotions that remain long after the moment of expression has passed. In this chapter, the solution space and current practices are studied to identify a possible point for intervention either to improve an existing solution or create a new one.

### 5.1. Solutions to Emerging Issues

A great resource for a glimpse into gift-giving trends and developments is the evolution of recommendation lists. These are published and updated regularly, covering a wide range of topics, and are available from a variety of sources. While trying to get an overview of the current options, the increase in digital options stood out. These are seen in both actual gifts and delivery methods (digital gift cards for example). Over the last two years during the pandemic, a big boost came from the need to establish social distancing. Companies needed to come up with new ways to offer their products to stay in business. As a result, online classes (for acquiring information, learning new skills, or participating in physical- or mental health-related classes) are now dominating the recommendation lists for gifts.

Additionally, subscription-based products increased in popularity and variety of choice during the pandemic [60], (which include beauty products, pet supplies, streaming services, meal kits, plants, and candles) and they merit their own recommendation lists for example in Business Insider and New York Magazines the Strategist, in both cases the lists were compiled of over fifty recommendations.

Working from home and being apart during holidays, gifts needed to be bought, presented and eventually delivered without any contact relying on digital solutions. Digitalisation is also helping create new versions of old customs.<sup>10</sup>

Convenience is one of the reasons for the growth of digital gifts, but awareness of sustainability is rising at the same time, and in general, people are getting more and more tired of stuff [61].

In the following table, there is a brief overview of possible existing products that can be used for the issues that arose during the research and were covered in the previous

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<sup>10</sup> Ungifted is a new spin on the office Secret Santa to be less wasteful and hopefully more enjoyable. A relatively new Estonian investment platform Grünfin is promoting in addition to sustainable investing also more sustainable gift-giving. They offer their own gift card to get someone started on their investment, but also other local options.

chapter. While a solution is looked at in products and services categories, there is also the possibility to solve issues by avoiding consumption altogether (*Table 2*).

Issue	Available Solutions
Feeling pressure to adhere to social norms and a sense of obligation to give a gift.	Avoiding celebration, creating digital or virtual events
Lack of or unwillingness to use resources	Giving a partial gift (money intended for a goal), gift cards, or participating in a <u>group gift</u>
Missing information about someone	Following social media, having access to <u>wish lists</u> or <u>registries</u> , and keeping a personal list of the information gathered during time spent with the recipient.  Giving short-lived gifts (edible items, products that run out), non-tangible gifts (a star, land with a title, animal in a zoo)
Unawareness of personal beliefs	Giving gifts that are impersonal (and can be considered neutral and easy to pass along to someone else)
Unmatching reactions upon receiving a gift to previously set expectations	Making choices based on wish lists, asking the receiver or someone close to them for a recommendation. The receiver can refuse to open gifts during the celebration to avoid attention to their reactions in front of the giver and other guests.
Contributing to waste production	Opting out of gifts, making donations in someone's name, using <u>wish lists</u> , giving short-lived gifts (e.g., <u>snack-magic</u> ), digital gifts (e.g., <u>woohoo</u> , ungifted, Grünfin), <u>giving time</u> .

*Table 2 Currently Available Solutions to Emerging Gift-Giving Related Issues*

While many solutions aim to make the gift-giver's decision and purchasing experience more convenient, fewer concentrate on getting to know the receiver better, which would help with the issues of not knowing someone well enough, and learning about personal beliefs, preferences, and expectations. Wish lists seem most useful in this case and require active participation from the receiver, which gives them a high gift-success rate. The Amazon wish list can be created by the receiver and used by friends and family to avoid gift-failure. This also works well with strangers, as it is used by content creators on social platforms (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram) providing a way for their followers to show additional appreciation by sending gifts instead of transferring money. During the research process, I had the chance to try this out for myself for the first time, as I found myself in a situation of coming across a creator that brought me joy and I felt I wanted to thank them with something more tangible than pressing the "thumbs up" icon. The Amazon service was easy to understand, and as the list was already created and the delivery address inserted, it was extremely convenient for me to use.

Other than using wish lists, which are a shortcut to finding out what others want without actually making much of an effort, there seems to be a gap in the support for encouraging conversations around peoples' actual needs and preferences.

## 5.2. Design process

Based on the gaps identified during the first round of interviews, observations, and desktop research, the initial ideation phase was aiming explore the hypothesis:

Increasing the giver's knowledge and understanding of the recipient and encouraging recipients to take a more active role in the gift-giving process minimises gift-failure.

Initial ideas resulted from a brainstorming session and were followed by feedback from a potential user. Ideating started with setting different constraints to organise ideas and encourage creativity and unexpected outcomes that would cover a variety of categories. One idea per constraint was produced.

For the feedback session, the ideas were organised from most relevant to least and 7 out of 16 were presented to a potential user. Previous research was taken as a guideline for the relevancy ranking. The user was asked to comment on each idea and conclude their thoughts with something they liked about it, and something that they wished was different about the idea using the "I like, I wish" exercise<sup>11</sup> (Figure 3).

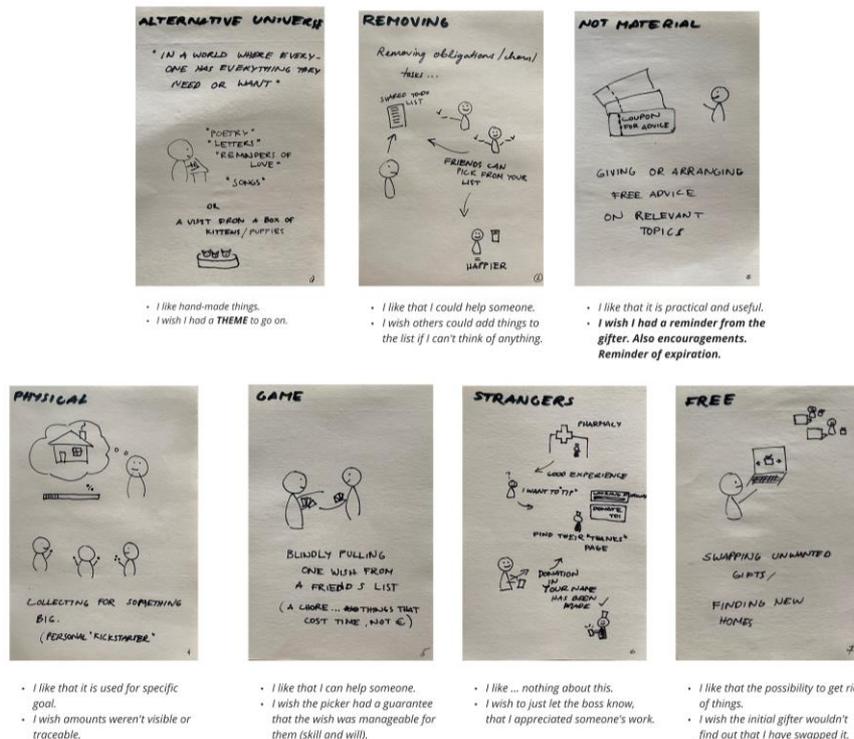


Figure 3 Initial Idea Sketches and Feedback Results

<sup>11</sup> A creative thinking exercise by IDEO used for rapid feedback session as used in d.school Starter Kit.

This exercise aimed to corroborate conclusions made from previous research and get a sense of what kind of solutions would pique people's interest. Most feedback was as expected and confirmed and clarified the assumptions. However, none of the ideas were deemed very interesting or novel. Most of them were described as practical and useful with an existing alternative in place, which works just fine. The benefit noted on multiple occasions was "having the possibility to help someone".

For future use, I feel this exercise would be more effective for testing an idea for a very specific need, not as open and general as it was in this case. Including more people would help get more insight into each idea as they could build upon each other's opinions. However, as a check-in exercise as it was utilised in this particular case, it achieved its purpose which was to corroborate assumptions, encourage creativity for the upcoming developing phase, and offered me some food for thought.

With the current approach, the solution seemed to lie in connecting existing possibilities into one supportive system to have a place where people can insert their wishes and share them with other people and services. The system would be curating available options, creating an outcome where gift-givers wouldn't struggle finding a suitable gift and receivers would appreciate getting what they ask for. Adding options for partial gifts and group communication would reduce stress in that area as well. But despite the positive outcomes, the solution centres around purchasing and exchanging items. While the number of unwanted items reduces, and full digitalisation of gifts is unrealistic, the demand for gift-appropriate products and services stays and the obligatory aspect of gift-giving would remain as well. The system initially intended for individuals could end up supporting companies and providing another platform to encourage consumption.

For alleviating the sense of obligation by encouraging reconsideration of social norms and fostering communication around a person's actual needs and expectations, a step back might be necessary.

A new question formed: **Can we design a new way to create a feeling of being appreciated and align the interests of those involved?**

### **5.3. Possibility to Intervene**

Reconsidering current norms can be aided by offering an attractive alternative to giving physical gifts by leveraging its most valued parts – experiences and time spent with other people. Emphasising activities that are surrounding gift-giving by creating a space to record and develop personal traditions for sharing our time intentionally and creating

connections throughout the year. To achieve the aforementioned, a supportive system that allows personalised expression and flexibility in customisation is necessary.

## **5.4. Personal Traditions**

During the initial research, traditions were briefly covered in the context of historical gift-giving practices and how the tradition of presenting gifts on some occasions started. Going back to the initial interview results, with the emphasis on positive experiences not so much the problems and needs. Time and effort still stood out strongly, but not only containing to the gift itself, but the circumstances surrounding it. Gift-giving isn't usually a standalone activity, it is a part of a celebration and an event that is often recurring, and the activities surrounding it are described as traditional ("There is always a cake, and the birthday is celebrated on the actual date."). During the initial interviews, these traditional activities were exclusively laced with positive emotions.

This led to the second round of interviews, this time concentrating on the traditions people have and how they describe them.

The word tradition isn't used very strictly at the present in the social context. People use it to describe how they spend their birthday or Christmas. Not just that it is a tradition to celebrate their birthday, but more specifically: "We always celebrate our birthdays on the actual date, and there must always be a cake." Some research would classify this description of a tradition more as a ritual [62].

I intentionally started the interviews with a wide question: Do you have any traditions? Some shared the distinct ways they celebrated an occasion, the weekly traditions they share with their family, or the ones that are truly personal and aren't shared with others at all. Other participants contemplated the meaning of tradition for longer. Not wanting to give a wrong answer, the meaning was looked up or having a more philosophical approach and considering whether shortcomings (belief in oneself for example) that are learned from previous generations can be considered traditions. Eventually, all the conversations led to describing the personal traditions specific to them and even when the initial belief was that they didn't have any, by the end of the interview all 15 participants realised they had more than one.

### **5.4.1. What makes a tradition?**

In the context of this thesis, a tradition can be generalised as any activity that is intentionally repeated.

When asked, how many times an event has to occur to be called a tradition, the answer seemed to be 3. This was mentioned when talking about traditions that occur once a year. People also differentiated between traditions that are not particularly enjoyed – Christmas or birthdays with extended families fell usually in this category. The others were pleasant traditions that you look forward to. Flexibility was an important factor during the latter one, it was the freedom of pressure, that people knew nothing bad would happen if they missed one time. The tradition would remain, and no one would be disappointed.

In a paper exploring what a tradition consists of based on examples from the weaving cultures of Southeast Asia and different sects of Tibetan Buddhism, the factors played a role in tradition creation and persistence: tools, people, location, material, transmission, lineage, hybridisation, and innovation. [63] Using this as a base and combining insights gathered during the interviews, the following parameters were identified that played an important role in supporting personal tradition creation: **specific people, significant date or location, a reason to gather or celebrate, and an initiator.**

#### **5.4.2. Benefits of traditions**

Research shows that having family traditions increases kids' creativeness, strengthens relationships, and increases the enjoyment of a holiday spent together. The activity itself that is done during a holiday tradition is less relevant, important is having the tradition in the first place. It is also suggested that the specifics of traditions are less than the number of family traditions. During the bigger holidays, it is found that family traditions improve the holiday experience more than any other type of tradition. [64] One of the reasons could be traditions creating true interactions and that the constancy provides a sense of security and supports a comfortable environment to open up. But when considering the interviews, creating traditions with friends during Christmas was often described as very enjoyable and, in some cases, it was the only time that the friend group gathered during the year.

Creating traditions can have a positive effect on a person's productivity according to Tanya Dalton, who is a productivity coach and strategist. As a tradition by default consists of factors that are known beforehand, it can remove the need to overthink and gives our brain the possibility to conserve energy and leave more room for big ideas and goals. This works when the traditions are participated in intentionally, not because everybody else is doing it. That would still lead to stress and obligatory feelings that were covered when talking about gift-giving. [65]

### **5.4.3. Conclusion**

Similarly, to the research on gift-giving it soon became clear that while traditions are nuanced, they are in general very similar across different people. The different types of traditions people have can be classified as personal, family, holiday, and memorial (remembrance, tribute). Also, the roles people take in the tradition-creation process can be categorised as the initiator, originator, self, and keeper (keeping someone's memory alive). Cultivating personal traditions seems to have a lot of promise in creating stronger relationships and with that a more comfortable setting to discuss personal needs and encouraging a more open conversation. Creating true connections helps people learn more about each other and at a deeper level. This leads to the final question that the proposed solution should answer:

**What could be the supportive system around personal tradition creation that leads to a conversation about personal needs, stronger relationships, and creating enjoyable circumstances to recognise someone's good qualities, values, and importance?**

## 6. DESIGN BRIEF

The design brief concludes the discovery and defining phases with a short overview of the research and describes the goals and expected outcomes of the upcoming development phase. It provides a frame and scope for the upcoming concept development by defining what the solution should do and what it is not meant to do.

### 6.1. Overview

Gift-giving, in its current state, is creating a lot of negative emotions and pressure that circle around one short moment – the exchange. For a moment everything is possible, the giver is excited about their potential success and the recipient is hopeful to see how well the other person knows them. If the exchange itself isn't a stressful event, then soon after a wave of disappointment may follow. While some succeed in pushing through their own rules to create a more pleasant experience (e.g., asking for donations in their name or creating wish lists), others face resistance. The resistance is supported by widely accepted and approved behaviour that has a long history – giving someone a "thing" for a special occasion. While there are some alternatives, giving experiences, for example, the focus remains still on the exchange moment and there is little accountability for what comes before or after that. The receiver is not responsible for the decision-making phase and as soon as the gift exchanges hands, the giver can stop being accountable for the given thing's lifecycle.

For minimising gift failure, a start would be replacing the object with giving time and experiences. But there isn't a compelling alternative to shifting the central exchange or rethinking the process by removing the centre altogether. This is where shifting the focus to tradition-creation might be helpful. By nature, traditions are stable and lengthy. They still might happen once a year, and every year they are the same. But the constraints that make up the tradition are removing the unknown and adding security. Spreading the tradition over the entire year could draw out the moment of anticipation that the wrapped-up present currently creates. Creating personal guidelines for traditions gives the freedom to communicate expectations better and dilutes the pressure that cumulates around the gift.

Alleviating the sense of obligation, encouraging reconsideration of social norms, and fostering communication around a person's actual needs and expectations, would lead to **stronger relationships**, and create **enjoyable circumstances** to **recognise** someone's **good qualities, value, and importance**.

## 6.2. Digitalising Personal Traditions

The digitalisation of gifts has already transformed the approach to gift-giving by emphasising **convenience**, increasing **accessibility**, reducing the giver's **accountability** and **effort**, by appealing to peoples' notion of needing to save **time**. Time is our most valuable asset and should be used intentionally, but not necessarily on the account of communicating appreciative feelings to others. And in essence, the process itself hasn't changed much, a gift is selected, passed on, received, and hopefully used (digital gifts don't have a physical reminder in the recipient's space). If anything, it is now possible to avoid interaction with the recipient altogether.

Digitalisation also allows important data **collecting** and **organising, connecting** with people regardless of the distance between them, and **transparency** in systems, which can be taken advantage of when wanting to create an experience that lingers. The proposed concept can use digitalisation to deepen and lengthen the positive connection people otherwise feel during the brief gift-exchange moment. A digital solution can help create a new, more nuanced situation that doesn't orbit around the physical gift but concentrates on the circumstances and activities currently surrounding it - **preparation, gathering, the time spent together, capturing emotions**, and looking back at the **memories**. By providing support during these different steps, the formerly brief touchpoint can be extended, while digitally recorded and stored memories can be used to stretch out the positive connection even further. As a result, a personalised collection of events can start evolving into a long-lasting tradition.

**As traditions are nurtured by passing on the motives and guidelines, having a digital space for creating and capturing personal events and memories can create a foundation for personal traditions that can endure and evolve.**

Digitality allows for **flexibility** in connecting to others by expanding reachability despite time and location differences. Adding a digital layer to communication can provide more time to think and react, which leaves room for contemplation. The proposed solution should create an environment where **personalisation** is encouraged to communicate the differences in **needs** and **preferences** among a group, creating a space where people come together to find solutions and develop something suitable for their specific situation to create these previously mentioned enjoyable circumstances and by that itself communicating each other's value and importance.

Creating a digital platform enables people to **gather** and **create together**, wherever they might be located. It also stores the decisions that are made and can provide a long-term overview of the group's history. This visibility can offer proof of the

connections people have created and of the time spent together by visualising the group's accomplishments, which can increase motivation to keep the connections alive. It can be used as evidence of shared history and as a guide for future plans. Creating a platform helps gather a variety of information and organise it in a meaningful way.

In addition to connections between close groups, all users of the platform could benefit by sharing their traditions and learning from each other. It gives access to others' experiences and the possibility to find new activities that otherwise would have been kept private. Considering that traditions are meant to happen regularly, last for a long time, and be passed on to others, creating a digital platform can help support the regularity and durability by conveniently storing relevant information, so the user can concentrate on experiencing the tradition itself. By learning from a variety of users and emphasising the need to evolve set traditions, the platform can also support adjustments that are more in line with the user's personal development.

### **6.2.1. Platform goals**

By using a digital platform to highlight a variety of aspects of an activity, new forms of personal traditions can start to form, evolve, and be carried on:

1. **Supporting the personalised set-up of a personal tradition** – creating a flexible system that allows establishing personal preferences around the created activity including frequency, duration, participants, expectations for the outcome, and other specifics that contribute to the experience. This system is the basis for communicating expectations between different participants and supporting the longevity of traditions.
2. **Enabling co-creation and developing a personal tradition** – facilitate interaction between participants, provide creative tools that are adaptable to different scenarios, and encourage co-creation and active participation. Providing easy-and-fun-to-use and customisable functions creates stable initiation from participants.
3. **Capturing and recalling the personal tradition** – leveraging existing technologies to record conditions surrounding the activities, engagingly replaying the recorded events, creating incentivising nudges between the in-between time of personal traditions to elicit anticipation in the participants.

### **6.2.2. Privacy**

At the centre of the solution is accessing and analysing data, both newly created while using the platform and existing one. The analysis is necessary to create relevant and

personal recommendations, support and visualise the traditions and share with other members of the group. This needs the user's approval to access the camera, photos, microphone, and other personal information and apps. Additional permission is necessary for analysing the gathered data and sharing any data collected. This can be restricted by sharing only with immediate group members. An extra layer would be sharing data that has no identifying characteristics with guaranteed anonymity to other users on the platform who are not connected to each other. Asking for access should happen only in stages where it is necessary, not to overwhelm the user and make sure that the goal of this access is as clear as possible. When the goal is to provide a personalised experience where customisation plays a big role, it makes sense to have a similar approach when it comes to privacy settings.

### **6.3. Users**

The concept should be able to support users with different levels of motivation. While people who use the platform to initiate the tradition creation can be highly motivated to change their current behaviour, others in their group might not be so inclined. As the creation process is meant to be collaborative and the outcome inclusive to all participants, the design should help to bridge the gaps.

According to the Transtheoretical model of change (TTM) [66] people have different readiness levels to change (stages of change): precontemplation (not recognising the need for change), contemplation (becoming aware of change needed, but haven't made a commitment yet), preparation (having strong intentions and taking initial steps toward change), action (freshly started the new behaviour), and maintenance (done the new behaviour for more than six months) [67]. While this model is mostly used by psychotherapists to guide their patients toward healthier behaviour (e.g., quitting smoking or overcoming substance abuse, an eating disorder, or anxiety) it can be helpful to understand people's motivation when it comes to adapting to new things in other areas as well [68].

In this case, while personal traditions would be more likely created by people in the preparation or action phase, the proposed design concept should also support those who are already in the maintenance stage and offer support for initiators who wish to include group members who are in the precontemplation or preparation stage. To create a durable habit, or in this case a tradition, it is helpful to remember that people go through the stages at their own pace and for best results, smaller steps are recommended for more permanent results [67].

Ideally, users would keep using the proposed concept to keep developing the traditions and progress through the change stages. Ten processes have been identified that need to be implemented for the desired behavioural change. They are divided into experiential and behavioural processes described in *Table 3*. [69]

<b>Experiential Process of Change</b>	<b>Behavioural Process of Change</b>
Consciousness Raising (i.e., increasing information)	Counterconditioning (i.e., choosing available alternatives)
Dramatic Relief (i.e., experiencing and expressing feelings)	Helping relationships (i.e., sharing with someone trusted)
Environmental Reevaluation (i.e., assessment of behaviour's effect on the environment)	Reinforcement management (i.e., rewarding changes)
Self-reevaluation (i.e., assessing feelings and thoughts)	Self-liberation (i.e., believing in the capability to change)
Social liberation (i.e., increasing alternative behaviours)	Stimulus Control (i.e., countering stimuli that elicit negative behaviour)

*Table 3 The Ten Processes of Change from TTM*

These processes should be considered more informative than mandatory. They might be useful to use as guidelines to evaluate if the concept's features could have an impact on users' behaviour. Also, to determine that the features are evenly supporting a variety of factors that help users in different readiness stages to adapt to personal tradition creation, keeping in mind that the initial stages might need more support than the final stages.

In addition to providing support for a variety of users belonging to the same group, the concept should also be accessible for different types of group dynamics. Based on the research interviews groups may vary in size, relationship levels (i.e., family, friends, co-workers, strangers), activity levels, and goals. The proposed concept should also support individual tradition creation that is private and not shared with others.

The support provided to users aims to help with personal tradition creation and sharing, but not by being a messaging app. While sharing information inside the platform and to other platforms is necessary, it should be reached through compatibility and taking advantage of the capabilities of existing solutions.

## 7. DESIGN CONCEPT

Based on the design brief the design concept proposal is **a digital platform that enables people to develop their own personal traditions, share them with others and personalise them together, to create lasting and repetitive activities, communicate expectations and offer support for spending time with each other on special occasions and throughout the year.**

The platform is available on different digital mediums (desktop, tablet, smartphone) to provide accessibility for a wider range of users and is created as a mobile app and web interface. Not everybody uses a smartphone (young children and the elderly for example) and to be more accommodating to different group members making sure everyone can take part in collaborating and have access to created traditions and guidelines alternative mediums to the mobile application are required.

Based on the goals of the concept, the proposal can be described in three bigger sections (set-up, development, recollection) that need a support system enabling communication between the different sections and with the user. The dashboard works as a gathering place for data created in different sections. (Overview of goals is seen in *Figure 5*)

The platform collects moments created during personal traditions, highlights them to inspire and motivate the users, in order to support the momentum of keeping the traditions going. Users collectively sharing their experiences helps personal tradition creation and giving intentional time to each other gain strength by gathering the force of everyone's momentums. Instead of *momentums*, another word can be used, *momenta*, which became the inspiration for naming the proposed concept just that - **Momenta**.



Figure 4 "Give time, not things" Momenta concept look

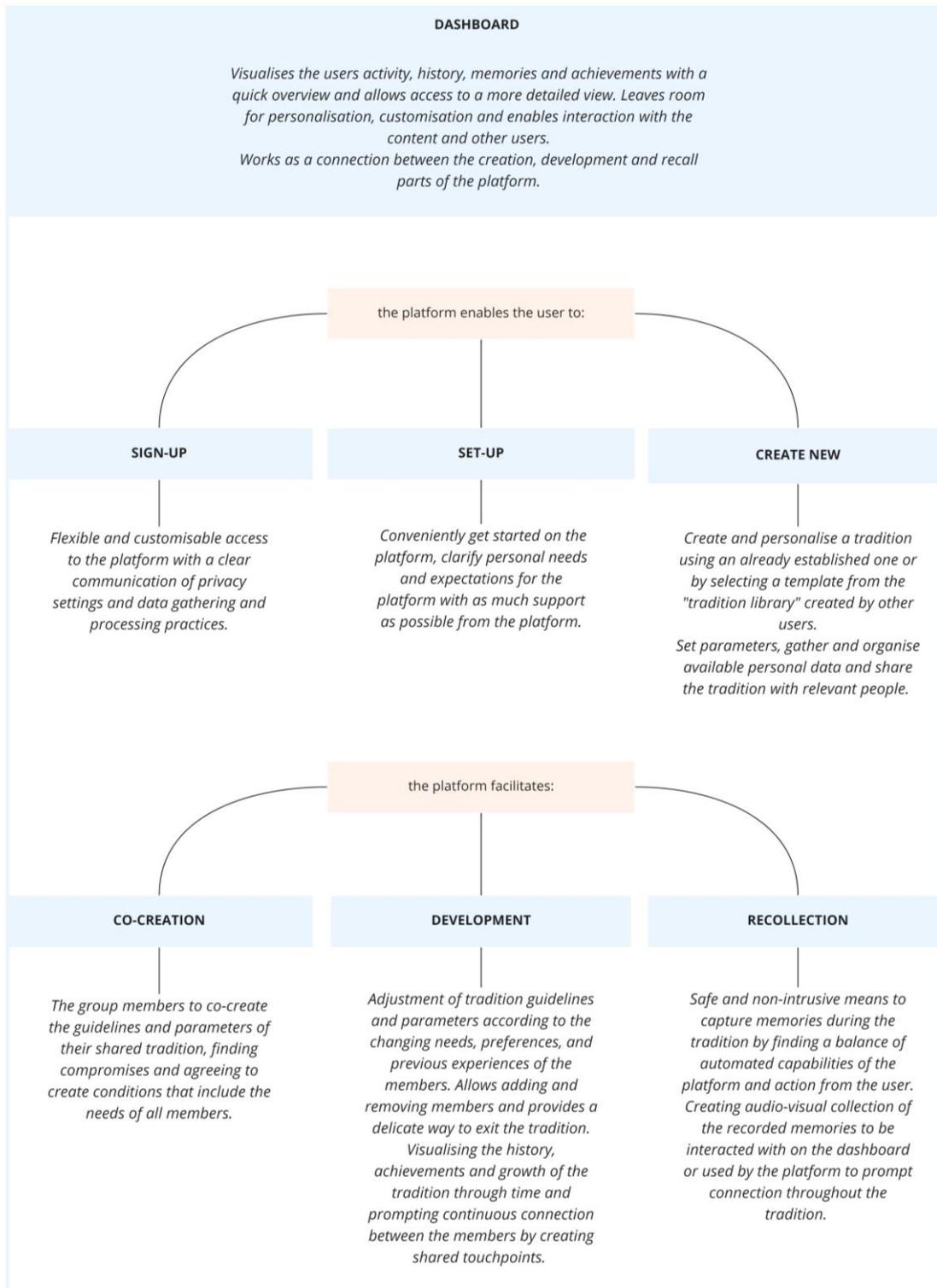


Figure 5 Overview of goals set for different sections of Momenta

## 7.1. Tasks to be Performed

The more specific functions that can lead to achieving the named goals (*Figure 6*):

### 1. Set-up and personalise

- a. Intake relevant data from users and other applicable sources.
- b. Produce a personalised shareable user profile.
- c. Translate received data into actionable and shareable recommendations.
- d. Enable data customisation by the user, rewrite data when applicable, learn from activity, and evolve recommendations and functions accordingly.
- e. Provide insight into current user behaviour and enable goal setting.
- f. Enable creating and sharing a customisable tradition.

### 2. Develop and maintain

- a. Provide the capability to create groups that can consist of both existing platform users and non-users.
- b. Provide access and capability for all group members to make changes, when applicable.
- c. Support group communication through compatibility with other platforms.
- d. Provide functions that support collective personalisation and decision-making.
- e. Offer prompts and reminders for users to interact with and share with others.

### 3. Capture and create emotional connections

- a. Use different mediums to record during the time set for the tradition following the rules set by the participants.
- b. Use accessible technologies and services to compile, play and share recordings, and allow for customisation by participants.
- c. Visualise the evolution and durability of the tradition

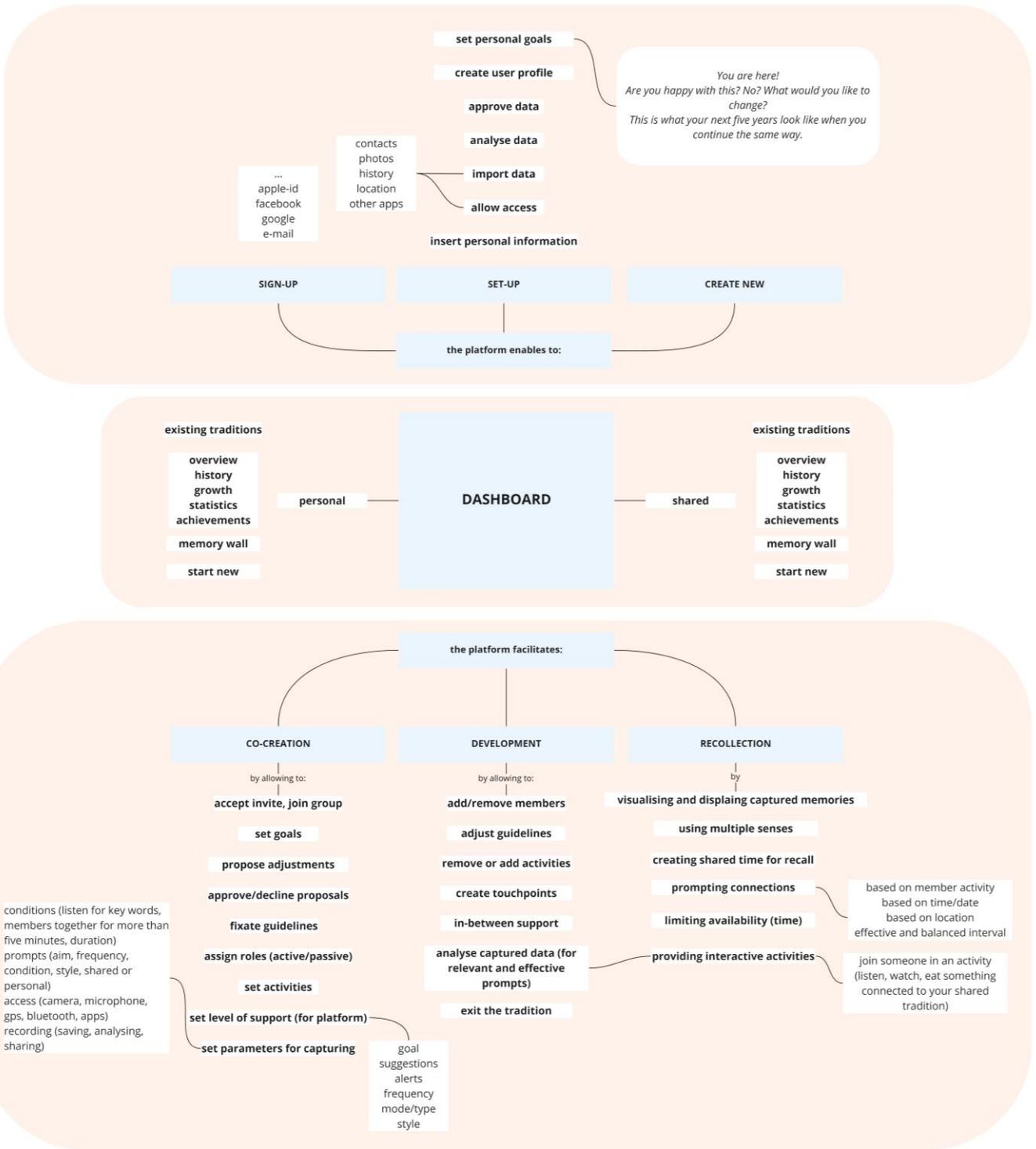


Figure 6 Overview of the platform structure

## 7.2. MOMENTA

To get a sense of what Momenta aims to achieve over time we look at Ben 20 years from now. Ben by then is a 28-year-old man who first started using Momenta when he was 8 and his mother Maria created their first family tradition.

### **The use case for Ben (in 2042):**

*It is the third Friday of May and Ben receives a notification that is already very familiar to him. The notification is reminding him of lunch at his mother's house tomorrow, letting him know about the weather forecast, some travel details, and asks him if he has prepared his story. The family meets once a month, rotating between each other's homes and occasionally going to their favourite café.*

*Ben is 28 now but remembers how it first started. By now already 20 years ago, soon after his parents' divorce, the three of them started going on monthly trips. It was often a hike somewhere, but also all other kinds of activities they enjoyed. He remembers using Momenta back then to select the next adventure as his mother described it (in actuality a destination and activity needed selecting by clicking a few buttons on a screen) and after the outing, his mother wrote down what Ben wanted to remember about the day. Ben didn't have a phone back then, so his mother used to show him the choices on hers. Three of them took turns picking the adventure, but Ben liked the months he got to pick the most, it felt like a lot of power for a little man. This is also something that made him want his own phone, he saw the photos gathering from his parents' cameras and he wanted to add his own as well. During the summer they always took longer trips and some friends, who he remains close with, joined them.*

*He also remembers not liking the tradition in the beginning, he would have much rather stayed home and played video games. But his parents didn't give up and at some point, he got used to it, even started looking forward to the third Friday of the month and the notifications that meant another adventure was afoot. It has come in waves throughout the years, mostly because of Ben's teenage years and changing friends and interests, but they managed to keep it going, mostly thanks to his mother. Also, it felt bad to break the streak in the app and, it was always fun to look back on what they had done over the years. By now the app has captured details about the 240 Saturdays they have spent together. They see where they have been, and what they have done most, having 240 group photos to show for it. They've had to work around some scheduling issues when one of the parents had to travel for work or use virtual means while Robbie was studying abroad, but not one time was missed, and it never felt like a hassle.*

*By now it is not a new activity every month but coming together for a meal every third Saturday and over the years new people have joined the tradition (the parents' new partners and their kids). They eat, take a walk and then each of them recalls a story, quote or a lesson from the past month and it is captured in the app. That is what the notification asked him about. The three of them used to do it every time they started approaching home after their trips and each had to recall their favourite part of their outing and it got written down in Momenta. Robbie has always enjoyed looking back at these moments and learning about his parents that way, he's sure he wouldn't remember all of these stories otherwise.*

## 7.3. User Profile and Goal Setting

### 7.3.1. User profile set-up

During the initial interaction with the app, users are prompted to set up a profile by answering questions about their general goals for using the platform and what they expect to gain from the app and provide information about personal preferences. This information is used for suggestions from the app side during different phases when developing a tradition. The current behaviours are translated into a look into a future (the user can choose how far to look ahead) that aims to show what consequences their current patterns might have (*Figure 7*). Hopefully, this would in a way shake the person to consider being more intentional about their time and who and what they give it to. Goals for time spending can be set based on that information and Momenta can use this information to keep track of progress created during the traditions and make suitable recommendations to achieve the goals. The goal-setting concept is inspired by Tim Urban's article "Your Life in Weeks" [70].

Additionally, the information is used to create clear communication of personal preferences and expectations that can be shared with others and considered while creating collective recommendations for groups. The user having control over the scope of what they wish to share and with whom increases trust in the platform and allows users to be more open with the information they share.

Information from other platforms can be gathered to further develop the understanding of the user. Machine-made assumptions need permission and approval of accuracy from the user. But personalisation has limits in this case, as the aim is to collaborate with others and align the interests, needs, and preferences of multiple people. The information needs to be generalised into categories to find common ground between different users and the capabilities of the platform to provide effective suggestions and prompts.

Seeing how the journey would be for a user in each stage when using Momenta, we turn to Elena, a 36-year-old woman who is trying to bring an almost 20-year-old tradition back to life and adapt to new circumstances after a two-year gap due to the pandemic. She can be considered an initiator of a tradition:

#### **The use case for Elena (in 2022):**

*Elena and her two friends, Maya and Eric, have had a tradition of going on a trip together each summer for the last 20 years. It has gotten more difficult over the years because they have all moved to different countries by now and some have very demanding jobs.*

For the last two years, they haven't had the chance to go on the trip because of restrictions brought on by the pandemic. But Elena enjoys this tradition, and she knows the others do as well, so she wants to make sure it keeps going. Elena decides to try out Momenta to make the organising more convenient for the group and better adjust to the new circumstances because understandably some new things have to be considered, that haven't been a factor in the past.

She starts by setting up her profile in Momenta. She chooses to use her Google account to sign up, so the basic information is easily imported. She answers some additional questions about what kind of environment, activities, or level of attention she enjoys. The app has made some assumptions based on analysing the information it was allowed access to, and Elena looks it over to approve or adjust it (Figure 8). She sets her goals for using the app: "keeping a tradition going", "support in organising", and "celebrating birthdays and anniversaries".

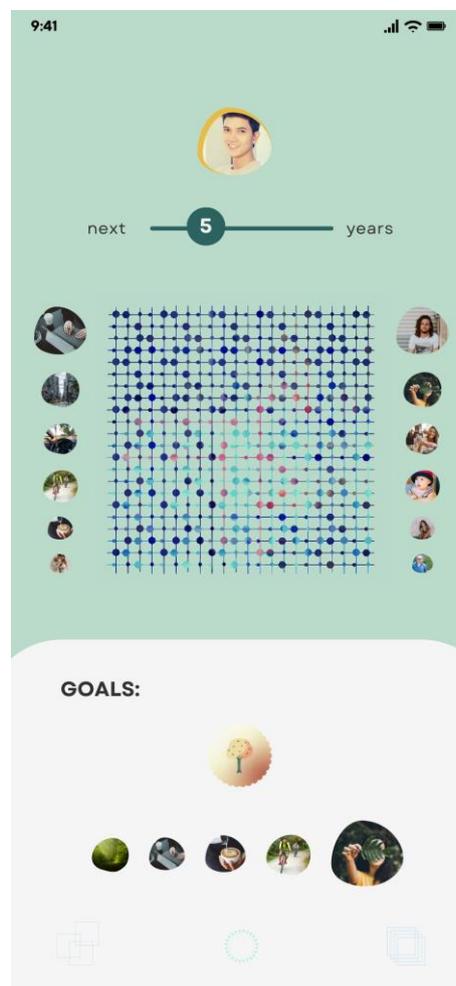
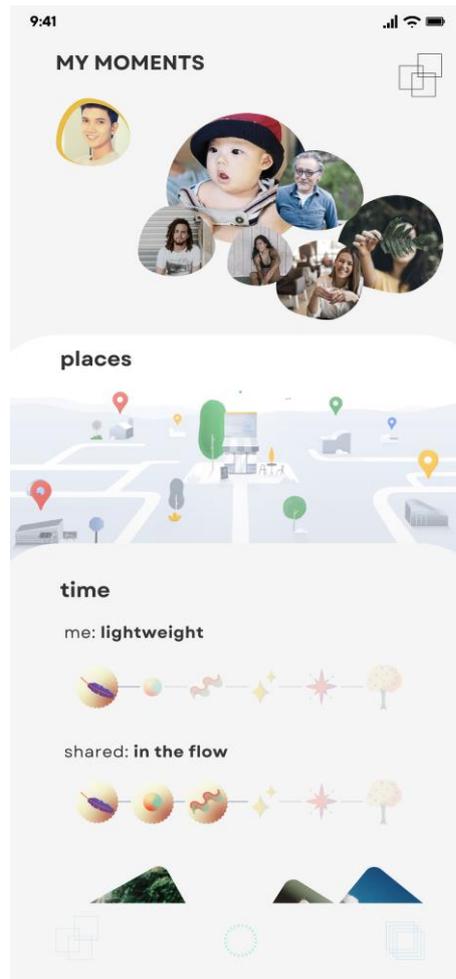


Figure 7 Goal setting overview during user profile set-up



*Figure 8 Personal Dashboard view providing an overview of statistics and information gathered about people, locations, and goal progress*

## 7.4. Tradition Set-up

When the user has done the initial set-up of their profile, it is time to create a new tradition in Momenta. The tradition can be an existing one that is inserted into the platform or a new one being initiated for the first time. To support personalisation, it is possible to start manually by filling in the blanks or using suggestions and templates provided by the platform library. Initially, the templates are based on popular practices and some original suggestions created for the platform.

When the tradition is created, it is also added to the library without any personal information and will be available for all users to use as a template and adapt to their own needs. Created traditions remain customisable throughout their life to evolve and adapt to the user for supporting the longevity of the tradition.

The tradition creation is built upon the basic elements (parameters) of a tradition described in section 5.4.1. Significant date, time, location, and reason are determined.

Duration and participants are chosen, and personal rules are established according to the expectations set by the user, to then send the tradition invitation to the other participants (Figure 9).

When inserting an existing tradition, providing some history allows the app to collect data from the person's phone and other social media platforms.

*Looking at Elena's next steps:*

*Next, Elena starts creating the tradition, she chooses a blank "holiday" template and starts filling it in. As it is an existing tradition, the app asks some general questions about the history: how long it has lasted, when and where it happens, and who else is there. Based on that, photos that match these parameters are imported from Google Photos and location and route statistics are acquired from Google Maps. The traditions overview dashboard now shows a collage of photos, one from each year, where the whole group is depicted. Additionally, it prompts a few questions: "It seems you prefer sea-food restaurants, is this true? You have rented a car most years, do you prefer discovering to organised trips? The weather has usually been rainy, is this important to you?" She answers yes to the first two but finds the last one funny. Then remembers, it has rained a bit on every trip, but it definitely hasn't been an intentional choice, so the answer is a strong "no". She fills the pre-determined categories on the template with her preferences – selects who will be joining her (from the list of contacts imported), chooses the weather conditions to be sunny and warm, and marks flying as her preferred means of travel, but not more than 2 hours and one layover, and the duration of the trip she wishes to be no less than 5, but no more than 10 days. She also chooses the option to add Maya to be accountable for the available dates, as she works as a doctor and is the least flexible with shifting her vacation days around. She feels this is enough to get started so she moves to create an invitation to get to deciding on a location together. She finds one of her favourite photos from their last trip, chooses it as the invitation cover and sends it off to Maya and Eric. While Elena waits for her friends to respond, she reminisces about the previous trips when scrolling through and organizing the photos, videos, and routes that the app recognised as being part of the tradition. She also adds a song to the dashboard that they listen to every time on repeat.*

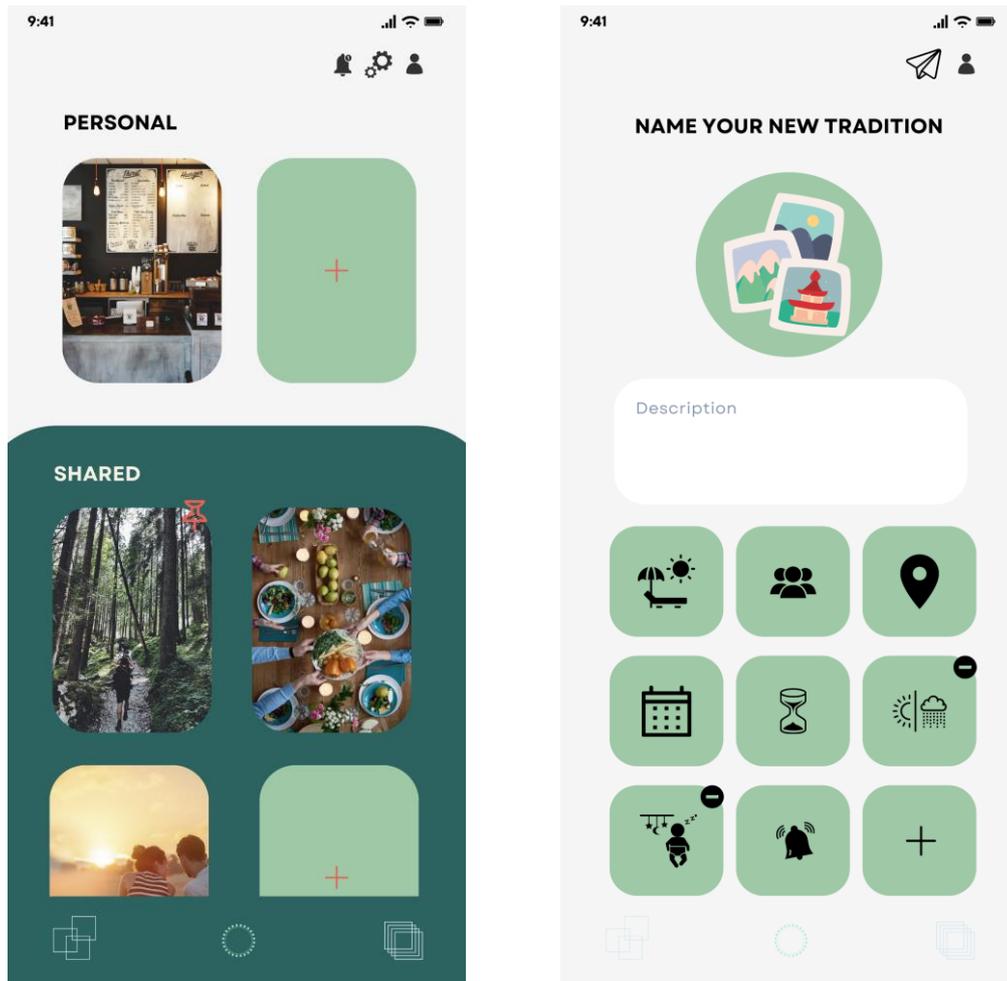


Figure 9 Overview of created traditions, option to start adding a new one and parameter setting interface when creating a new tradition

## 7.5. Development and Co-creation

In this phase, after the tradition is shared, the group members start creating collective guidelines for the tradition. This needs unanimous approval from all participants and the platform offers options to align the needs and wants of all members by finding suitable compromises or better solutions until unanimity is achieved. The rules are established through polls, selecting between options or approval through multiple-choice questions.

As most people have established a preferred communication platform for their group interaction (WhatsApp, Messenger, Discord, Telegram, etc.) this proposal doesn't intend to create an app that is meant for frequent messaging. Rather being compatible to share necessary prompts to other platforms and existing conversations when suitable. This provides the possibility to reach and include people who are not users of the app yet or for some reason don't want to be.

The initial development is done when the guidelines are established, and the details are set (*Figure 10*). But as people and traditions evolve, the development phase needs to be continuous and updated to keep the tradition alive. With infrequent traditions, the platform provides the possibility to set times for digital (remote) gathering to revisit the guidelines and adjust if needed. The possibility opens for everyone at the same time and can have a time limit. This serves as a reminder and the limited availability is there to support the significance of the tradition and create differentiation from regular event planning. The platform can only suggest frequency and duration, but in the end, the decision is still made by the group. Due to personalisation, the traditions can occur at different intervals, which need a different level of in-between activity to support anticipation.

Reminders of upcoming traditions aim to evoke positive emotions that accompanied the previous times. Instead of calendar-style notifications, a prompt for a snapshot of previous occurrences, or an activity to uncover a memory is offered. In addition, the memory presentation aims to involve more than one sense to be used to have a higher chance of an emotional reaction. Mostly this can be by using sounds gathered when recording and analysing the soundscape, combined with visuals prompted to capture or taken naturally.

*Back to Elena...*

*The next evening Elena gets a notification, that Maya and Eric have accepted her invitation and set their criteria. She also notices that the dashboard has new photos and a video and some comment indicators on the song.*

*Maya has proposed the last week of august for the trip, Elena sees that Eric has already approved that, and as it suits well for Elena, she approves it as well. Everybody had also agreed about the weather conditions, but Eric had vetoed sandy beaches in the location category (he was going to have eye surgery soon and was told to be careful during the recovery, so he wishes to stay away from flying sand). Elena sees that the app asks if she would be willing to be flexible with her flight time, as there is no overlapping location that fits with all three. She agrees and a selection of images of cities pop up. She is asked to rank them or eliminate them. Now she has to wait for others' answers, luckily not for long, because others seem to be keeping an eye on the notifications and interact quite frequently. Elena takes it to mean that the others are also excited about the idea of the trip. The selection is narrowed down a few times by going back and forth between them until eventually one remains and is approved by all. With that, all the parameters are fixed. The further notification style is selected: once a month + countdown, with a medium amount of organisational help. This prompts the app to show an overview of the previous years' activities: flight and hotel booked two months before, car booked two weeks before, restaurant search started a week before. Elena chooses to export these dates to her calendar. This prompts a conversation among the group after three months of silence, where they share their thoughts on their experience with Momenta and move on to a discussion on general life events.*

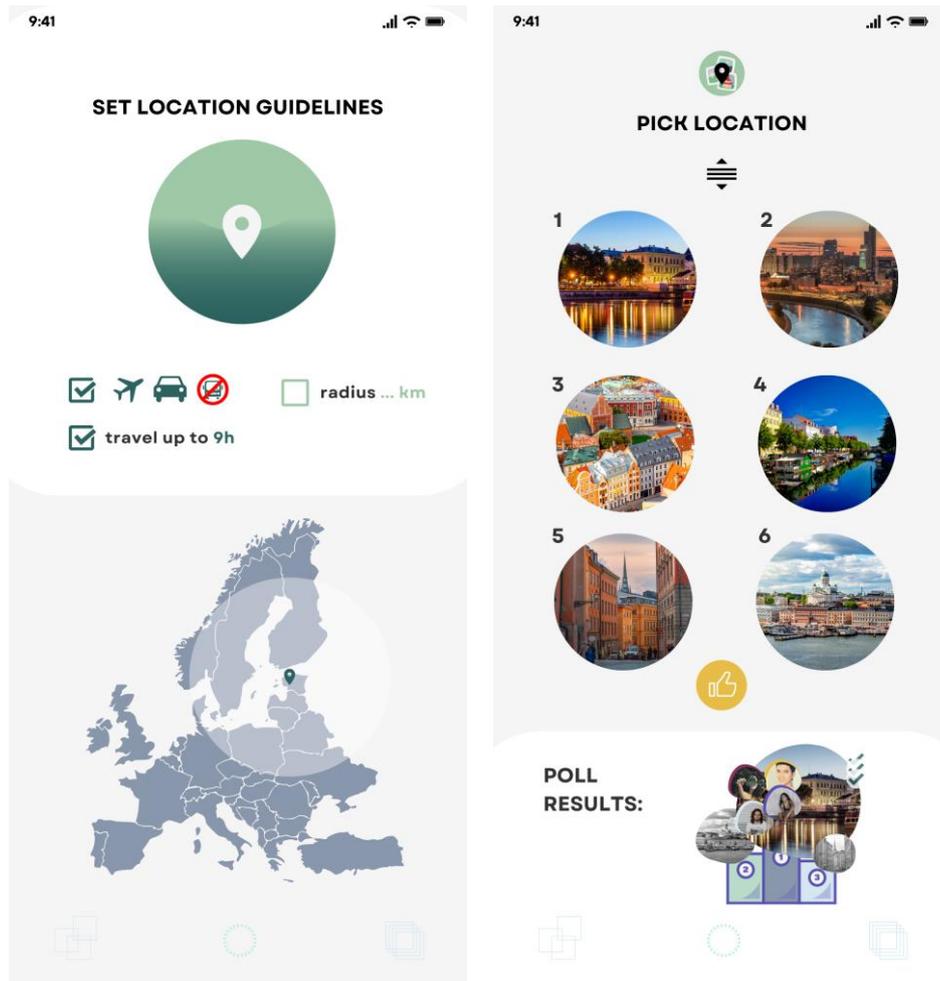


Figure 10 Decision-making interface during collective location selection in the parameter section

When July comes around, Elena receives a notification from Momenta. It is a short compilation video from their trips. The content consists of photos taken on the plane and views from the window and a lot of photos from the first days of their trips with their suitcases on their way to the hotels. At the end of the video there is a task, she has to match a member of the group to the flight distance from their location. Soon after she gets another notification with the results of her guesses, and the others got the same notification at the same time. The notification congratulates them all for getting it right and additionally asks: "Do you have your ticket?" (Figure 11).

A similar notification appears in August, but the video has a lot of movement and them in cars and the task this time is a multiple answer question asking about the number of cars shown in the video. And in the end a link to the car rental company that they have mostly used.

The final week before their adventure brings Elena the countdown with a notification every day. This time they are true or false questions about their destination and a scoreboard keeping track of the members' results. She enjoys the games because they are quick, and she can see how the others are doing, she is a bit competitive. Also, she likes that not all questions are about knowledge, sometimes it is just choosing what you'd like more, and she is surprised by some of the choices the others are making. She

thought they couldn't surprise her anymore. Additionally, she starts doing research about their location and marking some places she would like to visit. They are usually pretty spontaneous, but this can sometimes lead them to spend the week by the pool, which is also fun, but she enjoys discovering new places.



Figure 11 Reminder consisting of collected moments with an interactive prompt

## 7.6. Capturing and Recalling

Capturing the traditions aims to create meaningful outputs that create a compact overview to replace the album full of photos that might even be shared with others but not looked at again (Figure 12). These outputs are used to commemorate events but also for reminders described in the previous phase.

While they are used at "random" by Momenta for reminders, these are also used in the user profile section that offers an overview of the user's activities and statistics.

To capture these memories, the platform needs access to the user's device's recording capabilities, and data collected during the tradition to analyse the user's patterns to create better recommendations for future traditions and develop the existing ones. An

important part would be the possibility to record the soundscape during the tradition to filter out songs and environmental sounds, like quieter nature sounds or active nightlife commotion.

Access to data gathered from other devices, smartwatches, for example, can improve the experience and accuracy of capturing meaningful moments and allowing notifications on these devices helps to create a more seamless experience.

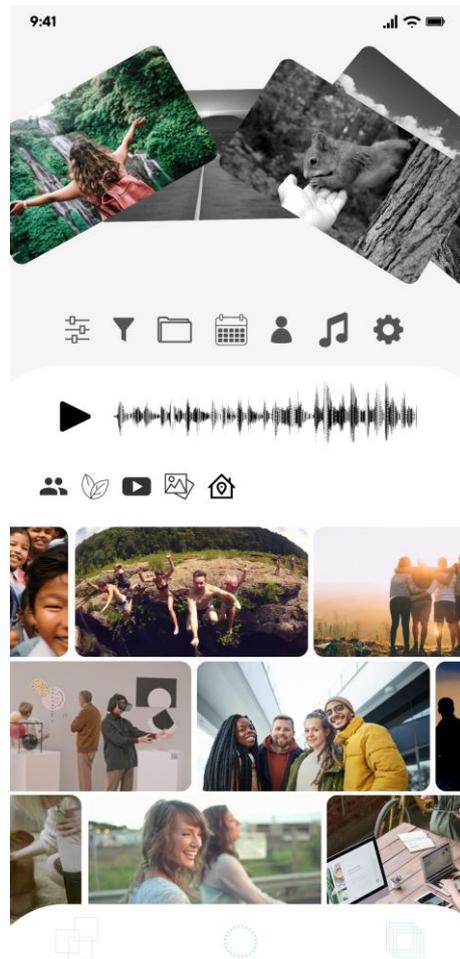


Figure 12 Overview of collected moments in the dashboard view

*It's time:*

*On the day of the trip, Elena gets a prompt to allow constant access to the app during the next seven days (instead of allowing access only while using the app as she had set before), which she agrees to. Also, she gets to choose what mediums she prefers memories in. Elena checks videos, and music and looks into the option of audio. In this case, she has the chance to record some keywords in her voice, that the app will then listen for during the week and provide prompts to take some sort of action. She also selects when and how often she wants to approve of the recorded data, so that in the*

*end she wouldn't share something she wouldn't want to remember – Elena chooses to deal with that at the end of the trip, as does Eric, while Maya wants to look over her recordings every morning, so it is fresh in her mind.*

*During the trip, Elena appreciates the prompts she gets on her smartwatch that remind her to take a group photo or record the surrounding audio. They are not relevant every time, but they are easy enough to ignore, so it doesn't bother her.*

*While waiting for their flight, Elena starts going through the days in the app, looking through images, deleting some and picking her favourites. She also uses the chance to write down her favourite memory and react and comment on items being added to the dashboard. The collective dashboard starts growing, with the information gathered from Elena, Eric, and Maya. She is also asked to set some guidelines for the in-between time of the tradition. This makes her a bit sad because she realizes the trip is coming to an end. When that is set, the app shows her an overview of their trip – how many kilometres they walked and put together they and how many steps were taken, how many new places they visited, how many hours were spent on certain leisurely activities. Also, statistics about photos, videos, reading habits and music selection. She feels joy and the trip ends with a sense of achievement when seeing what they managed to do during the week.*

*Two months later Elena receives a notification: "Eric is listening to the song from your trip, do you want to join him?" Elena accepts and the song starts playing on Spotify. A moment later she hears a ping and sees that Maya has joined them as well. The song ends with a question: "Are you already thinking about next year?"*

...

Elena's user journey was inspired by the first co-design session. A more detailed journey created during the session is found in Appendix 1. From the experience of that session, the following description could illustrate the effect of using Momenta.

*Elena's experience using Momenta - "I feel more connected to my friends than before. I don't get the need to reconnect but rather enhance our connection (because it's not breaking) and create new dynamics and closer relationships with my old friends. My initial concern, how we adapt to changes in our lives, was relieved and I saw that it is possible to stay and feel connected even when major life changes happen. The platform adds more touchpoints throughout the year and takes some of the pressure off from this one big occasion that happens once a year."*

## **7.7. Tradition Library**

Users are encouraged to share their created traditions with all of the users of Momenta (Figure 13). The aim would be to share experiences and help others find inspiration to create their own traditions and make more knowledgeable choices on how to do that. The library can be browsed for motivation and inspiration and can be filtered using a

variety of details: relationship types and levels, age, group dynamics, number of participants, location, environment, occasion, duration, frequency, effort, and so on. Found traditions can be adjusted. Creator of the tradition can be informed about the way people use their tradition to get a sense that they have helped someone somewhere.

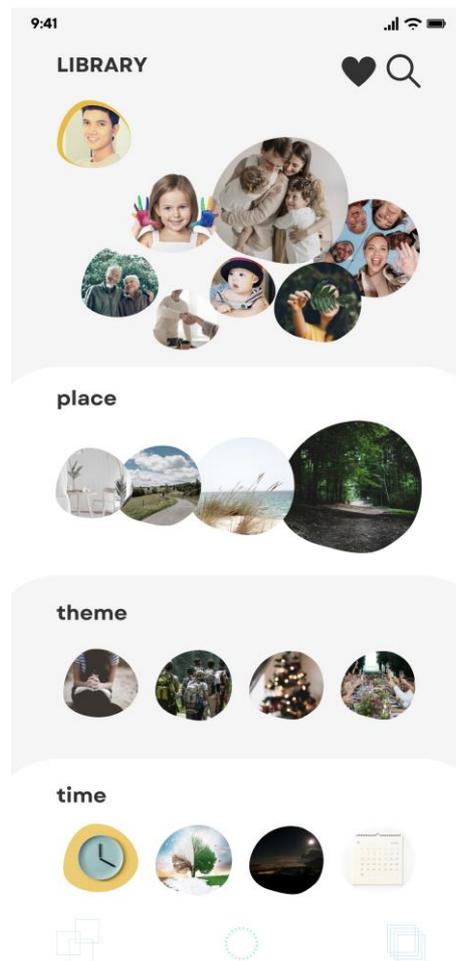


Figure 13 View of library of traditions, categorised by topics

## 7.8. Use Cases for Starting a New Tradition

Coming back to Ben and looking at the use of Momenta from his mother's perspective when they first started the tradition (in 2022). The second use case is about the way Ben, and his friends have been using Momenta is to celebrate birthdays, and this is explored from the viewpoint of one of Ben's friends, David (in 2038). These journeys were inspired by the second and third co-design sessions when we tackled the problem

of creating shared family time and consistency for a young child (Maria) and not wanting to host a birthday party due to disappointing gifts (David).

### **7.8.1. Strengthening relationships in changing family dynamics**

#### **The use case for Maria (in 2022)**

*Maria is recently divorced and has been thinking about creating some stability in her and Ben's life. Ben is her 8-year-old son. There have been a lot of changes to deal with and she wants them to have one constant touch point as a family. She uses Momenta's Library to scroll through already existing traditions for inspiration and finds a tradition "Sunday walk in the woods" created by a family of three, with a son about Ben's age. To make it better suit their situation, she changes it to once a month and invites her ex-husband Sam to join.*

*They want Ben to experience a lot of different things and make the monthly outings a bit more special, they expand the activity guidelines to include visiting a spa, doing some sports, or some cultural activity. They set up the duration range they are willing to drive for the activity and feel that sometimes it should be an overnight outing, so the duration range is set to be from 2 hours to 2 days. They create a rotation between the three of them for the role of the decider, this feels best for the new dynamics and is a good way to give young Ben some power and teach him decision-making.*

*The first couple of times are a bit rocky, as Ben needs a bit of convincing, but they keep at it. They learn something every time and adjust the guidelines until it becomes truly suitable for them. The reminder notifications start becoming exciting, the photos and stories that are captured in Momenta start piling up and they often find themselves going through them together at the end of their outings and reminiscing about the previous times and speculating about what's coming next.*

*Maria's experience using Momenta – "I was sceptical at first, but I can see it could make my life easier and support me in something that I feel is important. It would be good to have the support in planning, communicating, and recording the actual tradition."*

### **7.8.2. Personal preferences in a friend group**

#### **The use case for David (in 2038)**

*David's first interaction with Momenta was through his best friend Ben three years ago, when they were 24 and Ben used it to celebrate his birthday. He invited his five friends to an early-morning bog hike. Together with the help of Momenta they chose the destination and decided to all go together by train instead of driving separately. Everyone also got to choose a small task to do, except for the birthday boy of course. David was in charge of bringing everyone a sweet treat for their breakfast.*

*Before that, David was always a bit nervous about going on trips with new people, but that time he knew who was coming, and he felt that everybody was excited as they were making the plans together and even creating a playlist for Ben, taking turns adding songs to it. He also knew what was expected of him and others, and that everybody*

would like the treats he was planning to bring because he used Momenta to poll the other guests.

By now, the six of them are quite close and have decided to expand Ben's birthday tradition to include all of them, meaning they go on six birthday-hikes in a year. Today is David's hike. He puts on the playlist that the others created for him and starts checking off items on his prep list in Momenta. He finishes but sees that he is not the first, Ben beat him to it. He looks over their tradition-statistics and sees that today could be the day they reach half a million steps (combined between them over the years). They can do it!

David's experience using Momenta – *"I think it would be helpful, yes. If the new format of the birthday helps to relieve the stress that the gifts bring, it is already helpful."*

## **7.9. Other Application**

Use cases that weren't currently concentrated on were individual traditions and memorialising someone, which were brought up during the tradition's research. While in both cases the current features can be used to create personal traditions, similarly to what was described, it might be worth considering adding additional features. For individual traditions, this might include connecting to users outside of your circle and sharing activities with them. Either creating digital connections and relationships or passively participating in a tradition that someone shares (a nightly reading routine for example which doesn't need active communication in that moment but can still be shared by taking part in it at the same time.

When keeping someone's memory alive, this can also be approached on an individual or group level. Losing someone might be a catalyst for creating a shared tradition that doesn't actually include the person lost to a great extent (an example from two sisters who come together on the birthday of their third sister who has passed, putting emphasis on spending time together and on the connection that the two sisters have). There are many ways to remember someone and honour the effect they've had on others' lives. But this delicate subject wasn't further explored during this thesis and might need to be approached differently to be better supported by Momenta.

## **7.10. Future Possibilities**

Momenta is currently connecting smaller groups but enables all users of the platform to contribute by sharing their experiences. In this way motivating and inspiring others in their personal tradition creation journey, but also providing valuable information when choosing suitable experiences to create.

In the future, this platform could be further developed to be used as a tool recommended by therapists to aid partnerships or families with children. And not only by therapists but kindergarten- and schoolteachers who have a big part in the child's life during the formative years. I see the strength of Momenta, in this case, to be its wider use. Not only being a tool for therapeutical purposes might lessen the stigma and make people more acceptable to trying it out.

Additionally, Momenta could be expanded to professional environments and used as a communication tool in teams and across the company, for example, banks might have strict rules about gift-giving and monetary exchange between different teams and it might be helpful for teams to create their guidelines to share with other teams. The created guidelines could take a form of a graph that can be sent around or printed out and displayed in the shared space. The level of details shared needs to be controlled to be effective. Clear rules that are comprehensible at a glance would be most useful.

Doctors and nurses might benefit from communicating their preferences when it comes to patients wishing to show their appreciation. Giving a gratitude gift to your doctor (usually sweets or alcohol) is slowly fading out, but it is due to changes in customs, not people losing their sense of gratitude. A different way for patients to communicate their appreciation could strengthen the doctor-patient relationship, create a more trusting environment, and bring joy to both parties.

Similarly in universities and other educational establishments professors, teachers, guest lecturers, and supervisors can use Momenta to create an understanding between them and their students (or student's parents), of what form of expression of gratitude would be appreciated and appropriate.

In addition to the user-created content on the platform, access to relevant services could be integrated by co-operating with businesses and the government when appropriate. For example, when choosing a location (or a venue) for a tradition, businesses and the city can offer information about available solutions. Not all traditions are held indoors, so sharing guidelines or booking capabilities through Momenta might help people discover new places and find out more about the possibilities their local environment offers. As traditions are repetitive activities businesses can use Momenta to cultivate relationships with their recurring customers (visiting a specific café every Friday morning and ordering the same thing, the café can have your order waiting for you when you get there at your favourite table).

## **8. CONCEPT EVALUATION**

The concept was evaluated from the point of view of feasibility by going through the structure and features with Elena Màrmol Soley who is a telecommunications engineer, who specialises in computer vision and machine learning. During the evaluation session, it turned out Elena had a tradition-related problem she was struggling with, which led to her participating in one of the co-designing sessions as well. The other participants wish to remain anonymous.

Three co-designing sessions were conducted that introduced Momenta to potential users. The sessions were used to evaluate the viability and usability of the concept and make improvements to the proposal. Beforehand a short interview was conducted to identify an existing problem each participant had, either with gift-giving, time with loved ones, or personal traditions. In preparation for the session, I drafted a potential Momenta user journey based on each problem. The journey was then played through during the session with the actual problem owner. The journeys covered the user's motivation, needs and preferences, actions on the platform and in their physical environment, reactions, and potential emotional gain while using different elements in Momenta.

### **8.1. Viability**

The biggest question was about the capability to record, gather and especially analyse data from other applications and the surrounding environment. While the conclusion was that everything described was possible, people can be very sensitive about their privacy and not feel comfortable with active listening and recording. This can be helped by limiting the active time only to the time of the tradition event, specific moments that are prompted by pre-set factors and activated by the user, and only using parts of the recorded soundscape that are not associated with one specific person (filter out nature or city sounds, general background noise or songs played on the background). Privacy is also important to consider on multiple levels, asking permission to access data is one thing but analysing this data is another. Sharing the data, even when unidentifiable, needs additional approval. Automation, recording and accessing a wide variety and a high amount of information about the user can be done, but it adds complexity to the system and needs more consideration.

### **8.2. Usability**

The concept was tested with three potential users who had different starting points. One was transferring an existing tradition, another was starting a new one with her family,

and the last one was looking for a solution to avoid getting gifts during his birthday. This was done during a session that was used for both feedback and co-design.

With the existing tradition, the journey was easier to imagine because there was a previous experience to draw from and compare to. Most time was spent in the planning and organising phase. To different extents, but all three saw this as the most beneficial part of the solution. This didn't reflect in the emotional evaluation, because even if the part is very important it can be tedious and ironing out the details takes work. This is done mostly once and will need less and less effort over time, but for now, it remained important, very helpful, and tedious. The planning part was seen as especially beneficial in the two cases where not all group members were living in one country. This understandably needs more coordination and longer preparation time. With the new traditions, the library was appreciated and created excitement, and in both cases, relief was described when finding out that other group members had agreed to join their created tradition.

Overall, the platform was seen as improving their emotional state compared to, when the issue at hand would have been dealt with without the platform's help. All of them concluded that their initial concern would find support and possible solution with the help of the platform. In addition, the session helped them reconsider their current priorities and think further about intentional tradition creation even now when Momenta isn't available.

### **8.3. Equity**

While the motivation behind the design proposal is to highlight the different needs and preferences people have and the importance of being considerate of all participants in the shared activities, the development process hasn't taken active steps to create an equitable solution. Any features that would fit that category have ended up there by accident or thanks to common sense. Still encouraging conversation around a currently somewhat delicate subject and allowing for personalisation, will make communicating needs and wishes easier for the users and in doing that Momenta is aiming to be considerate towards a wider range of users.

### **8.4. Support for Behavioural Change**

Coming back to the ten processes that can support change in behaviour in a desirable direction (described in section 6.3). The processes are considered in the context of Momenta's capabilities, goals, and features and where applicable supporting features are matched with the described processes (*Table 4*).

<b>Experiential Process of Change</b>	<b>Feature in Momenta</b>
Consciousness Raising (i.e., increasing information)	Sharing information during collaborative tradition creation; Having access to others' experiences through the Tradition Library.
Dramatic Relief (i.e., experiencing and expressing feelings)	Interacting with captured moments, expressing opinions and feelings on the Dashboard.
Environmental Reevaluation (i.e., assessment of the behaviour's effect on the physical environment)	Goal setting can help evaluate current physical environments and indications can be given how much waste has been reduced because of the new behaviour – choosing to give time instead of physical things.
Self-reevaluation (i.e., assessing feelings and thoughts)	Progress indicators – having a visual overview of personal achievements and progress being made towards the goals.
Social liberation (i.e., increasing alternative behaviours)	Dashboard, goal setting, Tradition Library – providing information about alternative behaviour, seeing it in action, and seeing others' doing it as well.
<b>Behavioural Process of Change</b>	
Counterconditioning (i.e., choosing available alternatives)	Recommendations and organisational support from Momenta – making it easier to choose an alternative activity.
Helping relationships (i.e., sharing with someone trusted)	Group creation and customisation – flexibility in group size can help create more intimate traditions that can build trust in relationships; collaborative decisions in a group can lead to stronger relationships and more trust.
Reinforcement management (i.e., rewarding changes)	Progress overview – collecting badges, and seeing achievements in statistics visualises effort being made and highlights positive change.
Self-liberation (i.e., believing in the capability to change)	Progress overview, Dashboard – having visual proof of changes made over time and achievements, collected in one place.
Stimulus Control (i.e., countering stimuli that elicit negative behaviour)	Collaboration – support from other group members or other Momenta users; usability of the platform reduces friction and makes it easier to keep making positive choices.

*Table 4 Features in Momenta that support the ten Processes of Change*

## **8.5. General discussion**

In conclusion, the official and unofficial feedback for Momenta has been positive and enthusiastic. Everyone was quick to come up with an example from their current lives

where they might want to use the platform and they were very different (e.g., baking a cake for an anniversary, dinner with friends, birthday celebration, and even wooing a new love interest). For me, this was confirmation that users would be able and willing to create and share content and Momenta has to remain flexible and customisable. And moreover, they are willing to pay more attention to the way they spend their time. While the organisational support was viewed as necessary and important, it wasn't the most exciting part. People tended to gravitate more towards the library and memory gathering aspects. While the goal-setting feature didn't elicit a big reaction, I still believe that setting clear intentions, in the beginning, will lead to better outcomes and support from Momenta that is actually useful. I feel that thinking about the way time is spent and seeing it analysed and visualised might make us face the reality where our assumptions, actions and results are highly mismatched and not working in our favour.

## CONCLUSION

The motivation behind the design process remained the same throughout – wanting to reduce the unnecessary burden on people and the environment that is brought on by the current practices in gift-giving. Even though birthdays are happening at the same time every year, they tend to sneak up on us and take us by surprise. Going through the same process, multiple times every year (given we have several people in our lives we like and who we want to let know that they are cared about) it is astonishing how bad we as humans are at this.

The emphasis remains on material gifts and constant effort is made to make deciding easier for consumers and purchasing even faster. But giving gifts isn't like other chores, even if it has started to feel this way. Thinking about a loved one and putting thought and effort into the selection process doesn't need to be always convenient and fast. While we haven't mastered how to have constant success when giving gifts, we have developed a keen sense of identifying whether we deserved effort and if time was spent on us.

More conversation is happening around giving time instead of things, and that is also the direction for the design process focused on in this thesis. Momenta was created as a digital support system that helps create shared moments, captures them, and uses personal traditions to do that. Momenta encourages not only capturing special moments during the shared experiences but reminiscing about them throughout the year creating touchpoints between its users using digitality to bring people closer together and keep their memories alive. An old Chinese proverb says that "The faintest ink is better than the strongest memory". Momenta aims to ink our cherished time together in a way that doesn't let us forget.

The proposed platform is currently connecting smaller groups but enables all users of the platform to contribute by sharing their experiences. In this way motivating and inspiring others in their personal tradition creation journey, but also providing valuable information when choosing suitable experiences to create. In the future, this platform could be further developed to be used as a tool for therapy to aid strengthen relationships or support children's development. It could be expanded to professional settings or used to access relevant services by collaborating with service providers.

But for now, I see Momenta as a way to encourage shifting the current understanding of what a gift needs to be and re-evaluating our priorities when it comes to time and how and who we spend it with. Are we being intentional enough with spending that precious resource?

## SUMMARY

Gifts have been around for a long time, and they are not going anywhere, nor should they. They can bring us a lot of joy and help us communicate our feelings to the ones we care about. But the act of gift-giving has changed over time and has become more of a burden than a joy.

Not every gift is a failure, but enough of them are, that every person interviewed during the research process had more than one such experience. Additionally, there wasn't anyone who confidently claimed that they succeed in giving gifts every single time and it is always a pleasurable task. Each of us at some point has to take on the role of both the giver and a receiver. And while we might know what kind of gifts we like to get, the same logic doesn't apply when we give them. Our decision-making might get distorted because givers and receivers tend to have a mismatch in assumptions and expectations. This can lead to copious amounts of unwanted gifts leading to clutter and waste, but also strain on relationships or anxiety in some cases. Current social norms and expectations of proper behaviour around gift-giving aren't leaving much room to confidently decline gifts or implement new rules to this rooted practice.

While there are ways to minimise failure in gift-giving (e.g., not giving them, using wish lists, giving perishable items, or gift cards) there is not a good alternative practice to take its place. The gesture of showing care and appreciation keeps orbiting around consumerism and buying a physical thing. However, it turns out people might prefer experiences to stuff, and they enjoy what accompanies the gift more than the gift itself (gathering together, having traditional activities, the feeling of being seen and heard, and spontaneous timing).

This led the design process to focus on finding a way to encourage people to give their time instead. But as with gifts, not every experience will do and not all time is created equal. The experience needs to match the recipient (their needs, preferences, capabilities) and the time given needs to be intentional. Not having a one-off approach as we tend to have now, but instead, extending the experience to last years would be more in line with our actual goal (strengthening and keeping our relationships). We can use traditions to achieve that. Spending time creating and developing a personal tradition together and building on each previous experience can create a favourable environment for sharing enjoyable times and building stronger relationships. Giving our time instead of things benefits both the receiver and the giver [33].

This thesis proposes a digital platform, Momenta, that aims to encourage conversation around personal needs and preferences and support personal tradition creations for

families, and friend groups, but also on an individual level. Users set their goals and with the help of the platform move towards achieving them. Momenta aims to leverage digitality and the information provided during the user's everyday life to encourage and support tradition development. Gathered data (images, sounds, locations, activities, physical movement statistics, company) is analysed to provide recommendations and create prompts to recall and reminisce about previous experiences. In addition, Momenta uses the information to guide a group through the tradition creation process to reach a suitable outcome for all participants and collaboratively a shared personal tradition is established. Momenta supports the initiation and mediation process during personal tradition cultivation and leverages reminiscing to activate users. Depending on the set guidelines (frequency, level of organisation, number of people), the level of support is set for the platform. A weekly event needs less preparation and reminding than a yearly one for example. Reminders are created by moments captured during the traditions, using visual and audio content and interactive prompts. These reminders create touchpoints and keep group members connected in-between traditions.

Momenta is currently connecting smaller groups but enables all users of the platform to contribute by sharing their experiences. In this way motivating and inspiring others in their personal tradition creation journey, but also providing valuable information when choosing suitable experiences to create. In the future, this platform could be further developed to be used as a tool recommended by therapists to aid partnerships or families with children. Additionally, Momenta could be expanded to professional environments and used as a communication tool in teams and across the company, for example, banks can have strict rules about gift-giving and monetary exchange and it might be helpful for teams to create their own guidelines to share with other teams. Doctors might benefit from communicating their preferences when it comes to patients wishing to show their appreciation. Similarly in universities, professors and supervisors can use Momenta to create an understanding between them and their students, of what form of expression of gratitude would be appreciated. In addition to the user-created content on the platform, access to relevant services could be integrated by co-operating with businesses and the government.

Momenta is not meant to replace material gifts but to offer an additional choice for those who feel restricted by the current gift-giving culture. Leveraging the benefits of digitality, Momenta makes choosing alternative behaviours convenient and offers support to maintain it.

## EESTIKEELNE KOKKUVÕTE

Kingituste kinkimisel on pikk ajalugu ning sellel on oluline roll elus. Nende saamine ja tegemine valmistab meile rõõmu ning kinkide abil saame vahel sõnadetagi teistele oma tundeid väljendada. See algselt heatahtlik žest on ajapikku muutunud pigem kohustuseks ja aina enam paistab silma stress, mis sellega kaasneb.

See ei tähenda, et iga kingitus ebaõnnestuks või et iga kingi tegija kannataks, kuid see paistab piisavalt paljusi meist mõjutavat, et uurida lähemalt, mis seda põhjustab, miks me kõik pika harjutamise peale alati suurepäraseid kingitusi ei tee ning kas oleks võimalik kuidagi antud olukorda parandada?

Antud teema puudutab meid kõiki, sest erinevatel hetkedel elus võtame endale korduvalt nii kingi tegija kui ka saaja rolli. Uurimistöö käigus intervjueeritute hulgas ei leidunud kedagi, kes oleks saanud kindlusega öelda, et nad pole kunagi saanud ega teinud pettumust valmistavat kingitust. See, et me õpime enda kingisoove tundma ei taga meile edu teiste jaoks valikuid tehes. Meie ootused ja eeldused muutuvad vastavalt rollile ning otsustushetkel võime kippuda rõhku panema valedele teguritele. Lisaks suhete halvenemisele, ärevusele ja pettumusele võivad ebaõnnestunud kinkimise kõrvalnähuks olla ka soovimatud asjad, mis kogunevad meie kodudes või muutuvad kiirelt prügiks ning on omakorda stressi- ja saasteallikad. Sotsiaalsed normid ning uskumused sobiliku käitumise ümber omakorda piiravad arenguid kinkimise ümbermõtestamisel. Kui näiteks perele pakkuda uut lähenemist kinkide tegemisele või kingitustest loobumist, on tõenäoline, et antud pakkumine saab pigem vastupanu kui hoogu.

Saadavalolevad lahendused kingituste paremaks valimiseks keerlevad endiselt materiaalsete esemete ümber, vaatamata sellele, et paljud inimesed eelistavad saada kingiks kogemusi ning hindavad hoopis aega ja panust, mida kinkija on neisse investeerinud. Ning tegelikult, olulisimaks peetakse kinkimise olukorraga kaasnevat: koosveedetud aega, tegevusi, traditsioone, märkamist ja häid kavatsusi.

Sellest lähtuvalt sai käesoleva töö disainiprotsessi eesmärgiks julgustada inimesi kinkima asjade asemel oma aega. Kuid inimesed on erinevad ning ka koos aja veetmise vajadused ja eelistused varieeruvad. Selleks, et kingitud aeg oleks tunnetuslikult väärtuslik peaks see kogemus olema läbimõtestatud ning arvestav nendega, kes ühiselt sellest osa võtavad. Asjade asendamist ajaga saab toetada traditsioonide loomine. Traditsioonid on kestvad, läbimõtestatud ning sel viisil aja veetmine on teadlik ja tahtlik. Ühine isiklike traditsioonide loomine võimaldab pikendada üürikest kinkimise hetke

aastatepikkuseks kogemuseks. Koos luues just endale sobilikud traditsioonid aitavad hajutada pinget, mis seni on kogunenud ühe eseme ümber.

Antud töö pakub aja kinkimise toetamiseks välja digitaalse platvormi Momenta, mis aitab luua ja arendada isiklike traditsioone. Momenta aitab seada personaalseid eesmärke ning toetab nende saavutamist. Kogudes ja jäädvustades hetki koosveedetud ajast kasutades digitaalselt mõõdetavat ja kättesaadavat informatsiooni, toetab ja motiveerib ta traditsioonide arengut ning püsijäämist. Jäädvustatud hetkede taasesitamisega luuakse puutepunkte, et grupiliikmete vaheline side püsiks mitte ainult traditsioonide ajal, vaid ka nende vahele jääval perioodil. Momenta toetab kasutajaid, kes soovivad traditsioone algatada ning edaspidi võtab rakendus enda kanda vahendaja rolli läbirääkimistel. Ehk protsessis, kui traditsiooni tingimusi grupisisseelt kokku lepatakse ning eesmärk on jõuda üksmeelele.

Hetkel on Momenta mõeldud individuaalseks kasutamiseks ja väiksematele gruppidele (sõpruskondadele ning pereringis). Kui traditsioonide spetsiifika on jagatud vaid osalejatega, siis anonümiseeritud kujul traditsioonide jagamine kõikide platvormi kasutajatega kasutades aitab edukamalt jõuda õigete kogemusteni, mis saavutaks soovitud eesmärgid. Tulevikus võiks Momentat näha ka teraapiat toetava tööriistana paarinõustamisel või lastega perede puhul, kus ühiselt veedetud aeg on oluline faktor. Lisaks oleks võimalik Momenta kasutamine laiendada ka töökeskkonda ning kasutada meeskonnasisese või ettevõtteülese kommunikatsiooni tööriistana, asendades ebaõnnestunud firmakingitusi (aga ka toetades ettevõtteid, kus ka ettevõttesisene kingituste tegemine on reglementeeritud, näiteks pangas). Arstidele ja õpetajatele (või juhendajatele) soovitakse tihti tänutunnet avaldada ning Momenta abil oleks võimalik toetada ka nende eelistuste edastamist patsientidele, lastevanematele ja tudengitele. Lisaks kasutajate loodavale sisule võiks tulevikus kaaluda ka asjakohase teabe ja teenuste integreerimist platvormi, kasutades riigi ja ettevõtete tuge.

Momenta eesmärk ei ole asendada materiaalseid kingitusi, kuid suurendada valikuvõimalusi nende jaoks, kes tunnevad end piiratuna tavapärasest kinkimiskultuurist. Kasutades digilahenduste eeliseid muudab Momenta alternatiivse käitumise valimise mugavamaks ning toetab selle püsima jäämist.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1: User Journey Created During Co-design Session

