

Agricultural Allotment Gardens: Village-like Communities?

Case study from Brno

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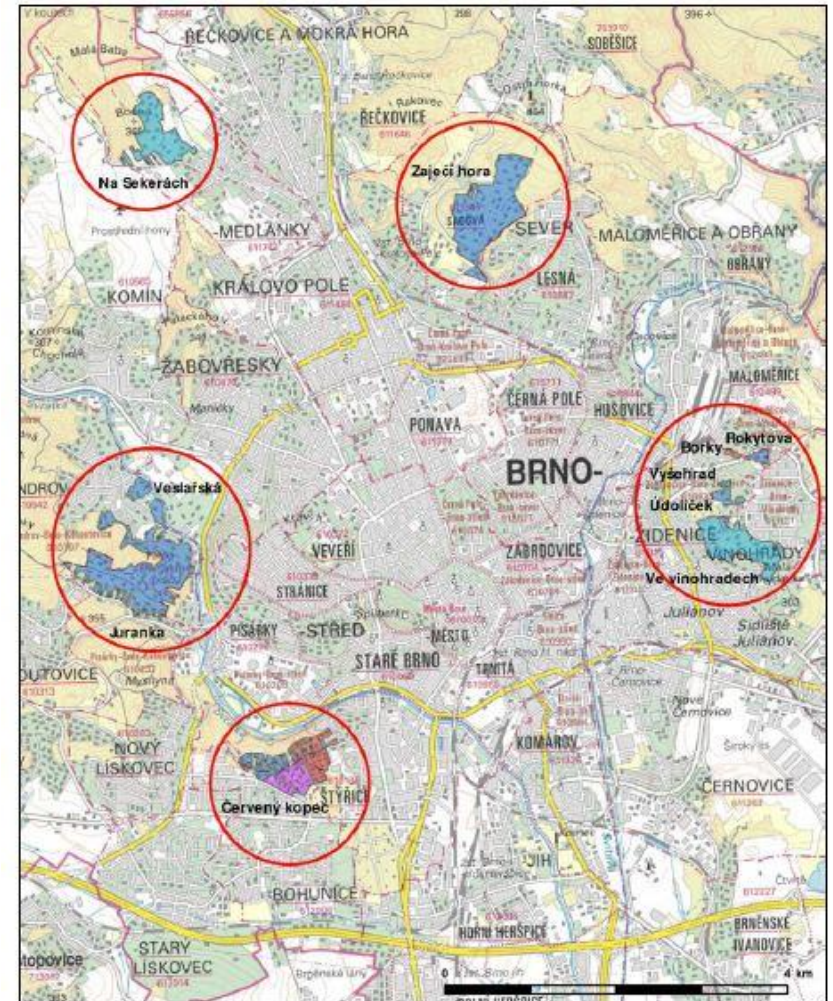
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Research context: Brno urban gardens

- Beginnings of horticultural associations in 19th century (Dr. Schreber)
- Coping strategies in times of crisis (like WWI and WWII)
- Urban gardening experienced its peak in modern history during the era of state socialism in second half of 20th century
- Difficulties of post- socialist transformation, self-stigmatization and shame for food self-provisioning in the 1990s – visions of allotments as free city development areas
- Currently, there are more than 1000 hectares of urban gardens, however, the tendencies to their abolish them are still actual

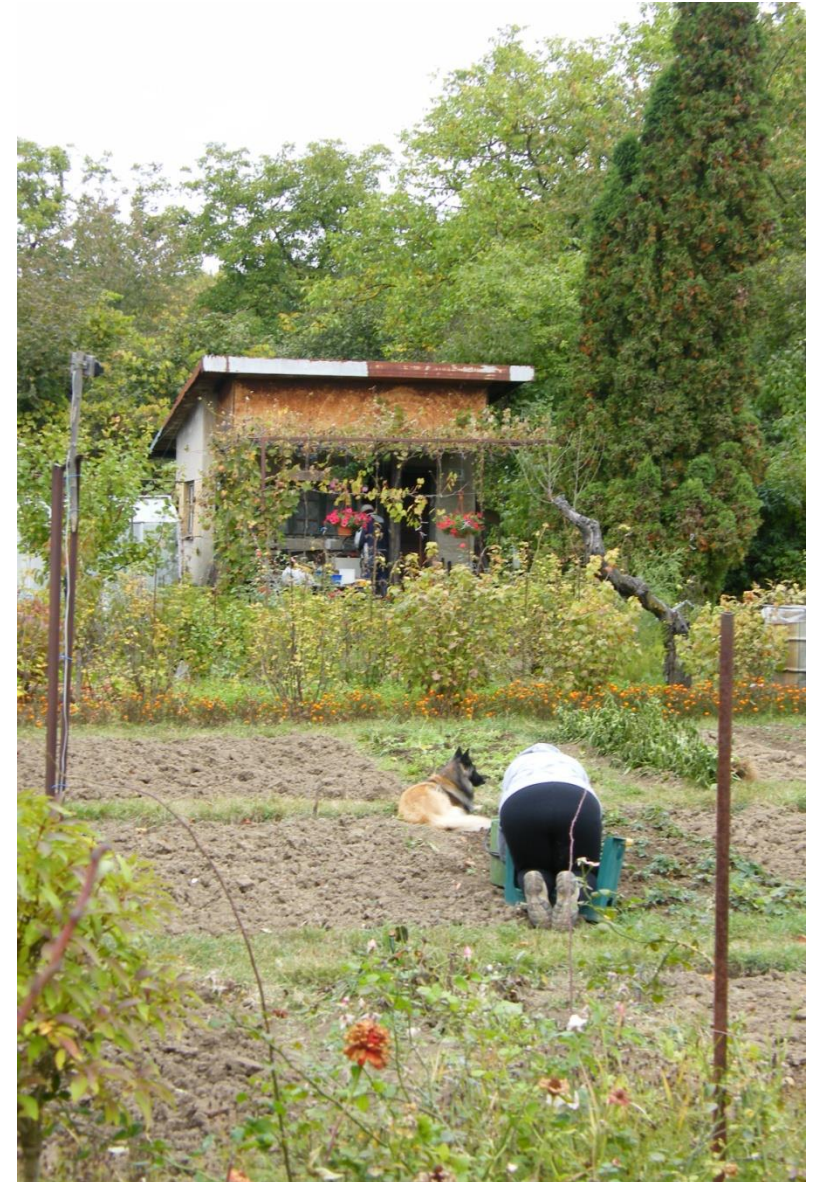


The research project

- Urban gardens are rarely recognized as a specific form of land use, which leads to their falling “between the cracks” (rurality elements in city environment)
- Valuing the urban gardens – project of „Development of Methodology for Assessment of Areas of Urban and Garden Production“ which would offer an integrative assessment of the ecologic, social, economical and urbanistic aspects of urban allotments
- Socio-ethnographic research
 - A combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods in cooperation with the gatekeepers (allotment officials).
 - The data were collected using in-depth interviews combined with observations in 5 allotments and consumer diaries
 - Research questions were designed to capture the social meanings of allotment gardening
 - 25 gardeners participated in the interviews; the sample is a heterogeneous group in terms of age, education and occupation

Narratives of community decline

- Collective identity disappearing (individualization, privatization, decline of community activity and voluntary work)
- Gardens embrace more and more recreational features – swimming pools, lawns, decorative plants ect. (same as in rural areas)
- Speculative land tenure causing overgrowing and becoming wild in case of many allotments
- Developers project banish gardeners and destroy former gardeners community
- Lack of interest of young people in gardening



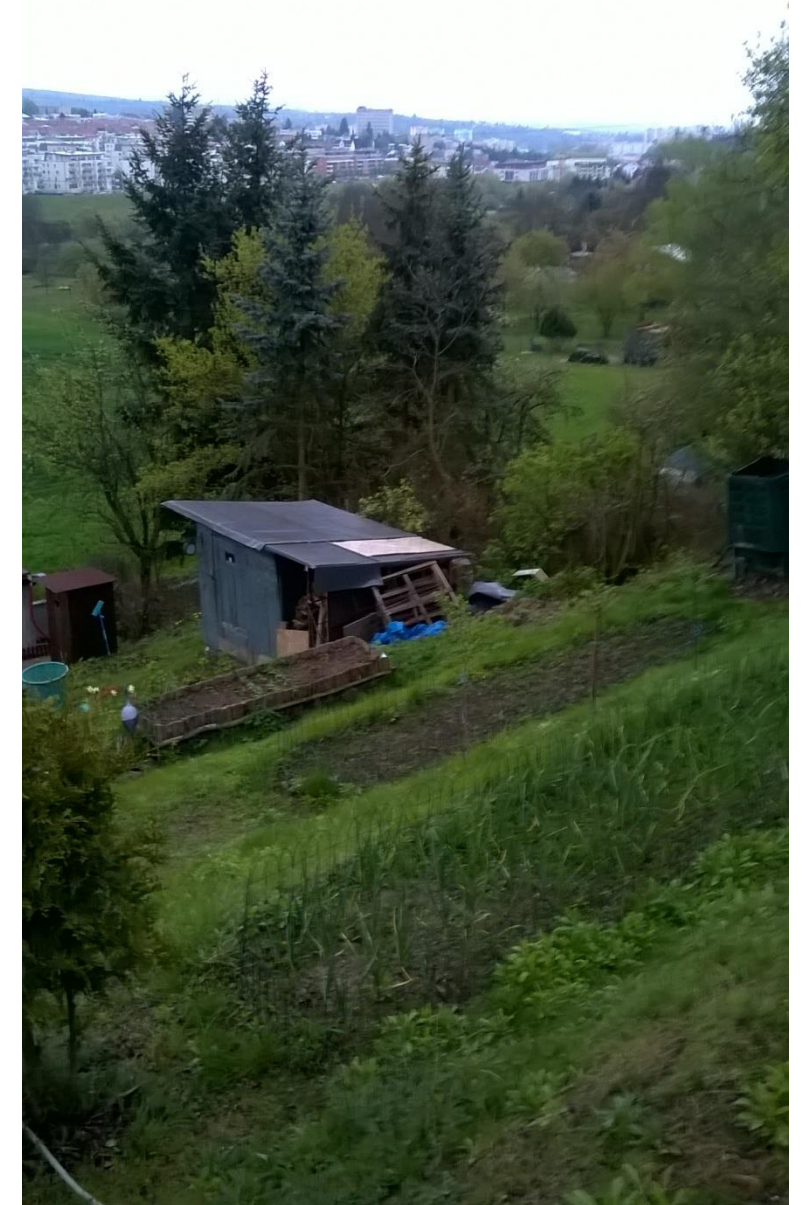
Emerging of new communities

- Push factors: collective defense against the city policy or developers, dealing with current problems or with burdens of (socialist) past
- Pull factors: beck to land, but not far from work and schools (seeking ecological luxurious aspects of lifestyle within city) – seeking alternative communities
 - 1) narrative of distaste for city
 - 2) narrative of a nice life
 - 3) narrative of self-realization (freedom)
 - 4) narrative of a return beck to land



Alternative living close to the city center

Ruralization of the city in its blind spot



Ecological luxury

- High quality of everyday life
- Self-sufficiency (healthy-food production)
- Develop of the connection with nature close to the public transport stop
- Luxurious self-restraint (voluntary simple living)
- Appreciations of the benefits from self-limitation (small house, low infrastructure, not owning certain commonly used appliances)
- Living with (close to) like-minded people



Self-sufficiency

- Both gardening and breeding
- Use of abandoned land for grazing
- Level of food self-sufficiency varies from 4 to 64 %, with an average value of 31 % (Sovová 2015)
- On average, a 200–250 m² garden yielded 122 kg of produce.
- Respondents do not aim to achieve food self-sufficiency, but they are seeking better taste and generally higher quality (gardening is regarded as uneconomical in strictly monetary terms)
- Bartering of surpluses and LETs



Village-like communities?

- Sense of belonging – garden as a meeting place
- Collective action, collaborative projects and shared costs (workshops, wells, roads ect.)
- Shared materiality (tools ect.)
- Mutual assistance in gardens (watering)
- Shared insecurity before official authorities
- Informal economy (bartering, LETs)
- Re-inventing tradition (ritualized community gatherings)



Discussion

From a sociological viewpoint, the notion and practice of urban agriculture challenges the traditional urban-rural dichotomy, that is, the geographical differentiation of labour between food producers in rural areas, and non-food producers in urban areas. **This blurring of rural-urban boundaries has postmodernist connotations.**

- Critical rural sociology perspective (questioning Toenniesian dichotomous approach)
- The rural idyll and ecological luxury
- Environmental justice
- Quiet sustainability (Smith, Jehlička 2013)

Thank you for your attention!

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