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1 **Rendering the Actually Existing Sharing Economy Visible: Home-Grown Food and the**
2 **Pleasure of Sharing**

3

4 Petr Jehlička and Petr Daněk

5

6 **Abstract:** Despite the unprecedented attention paid to the sharing economy and despite the growing
7 interest in household food production, the non-market and non-monetised sharing of home-grown
8 food - a social practice at the intersection of these two concerns - has so far largely escaped scholars'
9 attention. The goal of the paper is twofold. First, drawing on a large-scale survey (2058 respondents)
10 and four focus groups conducted in the Czech Republic in 2015, the article shows that in the Global
11 North the sharing of home-grown food is a surprisingly widespread and economically and
12 environmentally significant practice. Second, the article to some extent aims to break with the
13 research tradition that deems studies conducted in the periphery of the Global North lacking in
14 potential to produce more generally valid insights. It therefore seeks to counter the scripting of
15 Eastern Europe on the margins of the geographies of knowledge production. The article contests the
16 causal link between economic hardship and informal food practices, views these practices as
17 sustainability by outcome rather than intention, and suggests they are compatible with the tenets of
18 alternative food networks. While not perceived as sites of outright resistance to capitalism, these
19 spaces are viewed by practitioners as constituting valuable domains of socially and culturally
20 motivated human interactions, driven by the desire for fresh and healthy food, fulfilling personal
21 hobbies, and the development of enjoyable social ties.

22

23 **Keywords:** alternative food networks; knowledge production; household food production; sharing
24 economy; sustainable consumption, re-localisation

25 **Introduction: the lack of research on the informal sharing economy in the Global North**

26 There is a curious blind spot at the intersection of two currently growing bodies of literature - the
27 frenzy over the 'sharing' alternatives to the mainstream economic model on the one hand and the
28 growing attention given to informal food provisioning in explorations of transitions to a more
29 sustainable food system on the other. This blind spot relates to the informal, non-market form of the
30 sharing of food produced by households. While long overlooked by research on the re-localisation of
31 the food system in the Global North, home gardening¹ (also referred to as household food production,
32 grow-your-own, or food self-provisioning) is increasingly being recognised by alternative food
33 scholars as an important food-*producing* social practice (McEntee 2010; Schupp and Sharp 2012;
34 McClintock 2014) and as a significant contributor to the sustainability of the agrifood system (Schupp
35 *et al.* 2016). However, various non-market, informal forms of *distributing* home-grown food, ranging
36 from gift-giving, sharing and exchanging, remain on the margins of alternative food scholarship's
37 interest (Goodman *et al.* 2012; Kneafsey *et al.* 2008).

38 Seeking to fill this lacuna, this article shows that the sharing of home-grown food is a surprisingly
39 widespread and economically and environmentally significant practice. By questioning the causal
40 link between economic hardship and informal food sharing practices and viewing such practices as
41 sustainability by outcome rather than intention, the article suggests a more positive conceptualisation
42 of these practices, one that is broadly compatible with but transcends the tenets of alternative food
43 networks.

44
45 In many respects, the lack of literature on the informal sharing of home-produced food in the Global
46 North seems striking. There has been a long-standing interest in the social sciences in alternative
47 exchange networks, an interest that goes back to the countercultural 1960s (Gritzas and Kavoulakos
48 2015). Since the early 2000s there has been a resurgence of interest in the social sciences in sharing
49 and sharing economies.² Drawing on the body of work on alternatives to mainstream thinking on
50 development (Gold 2004) and on the concept of the diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 1996), the

51 interest in sharing was initially carried by hopes and euphoria about the capacity of this ‘third
52 perspective on capitalism and consumerism’ (Heinrichs 2013) to minimise resource use, disrupt the
53 mainstream economy, erode consumerism and foster social cohesion (Hamari *et al.* 2015).

54

55 However, with the meteoric rise of the ‘sharing economy’ in the first half of the 2010s that was
56 facilitated by digital platforms, the prism through which sharing and the sharing economy are viewed
57 has shifted. The interest has become less concerned with their potential as alternatives to mainstream
58 economic relations and as a form of economic re-localisation and way of fostering community and
59 has become increasingly fascinated with the efficiency of digital platforms to facilitate market
60 transactions. As a result, with the focus of these platforms on profit maximisation, the sharing
61 economy’s potential as a novel path to sustainability (Heinrichs 2013) has been called into question
62 as the detrimental environmental and social effects of much of the platform-based economy have
63 become increasingly apparent (Schor 2014; Slee 2016). The sharing economy has been reframed from
64 a critique of hyper-consumption to purely an economic opportunity (Martin 2016) and has become
65 ‘neoliberalism on steroids’ (Morozov [2013] cited in Richardson [2015]).

66

67 Taking inspiration from Gibson-Graham’s (2008) understanding of performativity and Gibson *et al.*’s
68 (2010) point about the importance of representation for how the future is imagined, this article
69 responds to these recent trends regarding the sharing economy by focusing on informal, non-market,
70 non-monetary and mostly non-platform forms of localised sharing of home-grown food. Compared
71 to sustained research efforts on this and similar types of sharing in development studies and social
72 anthropology (e.g. Baird and Gray 2014; Gurven *et al.* 2015), research on the informal sharing of
73 home-grown food in the Global North remains rare (but see Kamiyama *et al.* [2016] for a recent
74 account of the sharing of home grown food in rural Japan). Informal sharing practices in the Global
75 South are typically researched in the context of livelihood strategies, safety nets and the
76 transformation of ‘traditional economies’ towards ‘standard’ market relations. In the context of the

77 Global North the discursive hegemony of the mainstream capitalist economy renders these types of
78 economic interactions ‘invisible’ as they are deemed residual and marginal and hence inappropriate
79 for ‘developed’ societies. Even in the context of the research on what Gritzas and Kavoulakos (2015,
80 p. 8) call the ‘hidden neverland’ of Northern alternative practices (innovative alternative economies
81 and alternative economic exchanges) informal sharing practices are overshadowed by the focus on
82 innovative market-based economic alternatives, such as community-supported agriculture and
83 solidarity purchasing groups.

84

85 We find the negative framing of informal food practices (as lacking and residual due to their
86 association with poverty and coping strategies) problematic. Instead we propose viewing them in a
87 positive light as practices that extend food provisioning beyond conventional market interactions and
88 as practices that have a role in strengthening social cohesion, environmental sustainability and food
89 re-localisation (Fraňková 2015). We adopt an inductive approach to our research and seek to derive
90 some preliminary insights into the workings of an informal food sharing economy in the Global
91 North. In our effort to present these practices as important alternatives in the Global North we drew
92 inspiration from a broad stream of literature that highlights sharing’s significant social and
93 environmental benefits and its transformative potential. The first source is J. K. Gibson-Graham’s
94 (2008) concept of the diverse economies in which a broadly defined form of non-market sharing (as
95 gifts and barter) is the prominent component. The second source is Duncan McLaren and Julian
96 Agyeman’s (2015) inclusive conceptualisation of sharing as the ‘sharing paradigm’ which
97 encompasses both communal and commercial forms of sharing (see Table 1). Here we were inspired
98 by these authors’ enthusiasm for sharing’s transformative potential reflected in their claim that
99 practices of sharing may constitute ‘the seeds of a potentially post-capitalist society’ (McLaren and
100 Agyeman 2015, p. 8). And the third source is Russell Belk’s seminal work on defining sharing in
101 relation to the concepts of gift and exchange (Belk 2010). Belk’s delineations of three prototypes of

102 economic behaviour are useful to us for two reasons. First, despite the emphasis placed on precision
 103 and distinctions in the descriptions of the three prototypes of economic interactions, Belk recognises
 104 that in the real world the two types of non-market interactions - gift and sharing - form a continuum
 105 rather than being mutually exclusive. At the same time, market-based exchange is clearly a separate
 106 type of economic interaction. Second, Belk highlights the importance of gift and sharing for social
 107 reproduction, underlining their role in nurturing trust and cooperation.

108 **Table 1:** Diversity of the sharing paradigm (adapted from McLaren and Agyeman 2015).

Type of sharing	Intermediated sharing (learned)	Sociocultural sharing (evolved)
Non-commercial sharing (intrinsically motivated)	Peer-to-peer sharing facilitated by non-profit intermediaries	Informal (non-monetised) sharing within family, friends and neighbours
Commercial sharing (extrinsically motivated)	The ‘sharing economy’ facilitated by for profit platform-based companies	The ‘collective economy’ of co-production and open sourcing in business

109 Belk refined and expanded his original definition of sharing as ‘the act and processes of distributing
 110 what is ours to others for their use and/or the act and process of receiving or taking something from
 111 others for our use’ (Belk 2007, p. 126) by highlighting the non-reciprocal, non-ceremonial character
 112 of this interaction in which money is irrelevant (Belk 2010, p. 721). Sharing is distinguished from
 113 gift-giving, as the latter includes the desire to please recipients and has a non-reciprocal and non-
 114 obligatory appearance while it is reciprocal and obligatory in practice (Belk 2010). These
 115 conceptualisations of sharing and gift-giving broadly correspond to non-commercial, sociocultural
 116 sharing in Table 1. These interactions are organised directly by participants without commercial, for-
 117 profit intermediary involvement (i.e. this sharing is evolved and intrinsically motivated – see Table
 118 1).

119

120 In this paper we are concerned with non-commercial, non-monetised, informal practices of
 121 distribution involving home-grown food on the continuum that includes both sharing and gift-giving
 122 in the sense of Belk’s (2010) definitions of these terms. We know from previous research (Smith and

123 Jehlička 2013) that while people in everyday situations often do not distinguish between these two
124 non-market categories of economic interaction, they are clearly aware of their distinction from market
125 exchanges. In practice these non-market transactions take a range of hybrid forms between the ideal
126 notion of sharing and the ideal notion gift-giving. However, their common denominator is that they
127 take place outside the market and they are not motivated by profit-making. In the remainder of the
128 article we will refer to all forms of sharing and gift-giving as sharing.

129

130 **Extending knowledge on informal food sharing**

131 The overarching goal of this paper is to contribute to Gibson-Graham's endeavour (2008) to make
132 visible once hidden alternatives in order to develop alternative futures. Drawing on research
133 conducted in the Czech Republic, the article's goal is to shed light on how the non-market sharing
134 economy that is invisible but nonetheless exists in the Global North operates. We look at the types
135 and volumes of food people share, the size and social composition of sharing networks and the degree
136 of their localness. We identify the social backgrounds of food donors and recipients and their
137 motivations for sharing, including the relative importance of mutual obligations in these interactions.
138 We also link diverse levels of involvement in sharing networks to value orientations and the social
139 backgrounds of people involved in these networks. As the research draws primarily on data from a
140 quantitative survey and to some extent from the focus groups, our findings reveal general patterns
141 and provide only initial insights into the informal food-sharing economy. Further and more
142 qualitatively oriented research will be needed to develop more nuanced accounts of causalities and
143 explanations of the findings outlined in this paper.

144

145 Prior to delving into the exploration of the Czech food-sharing economy we need to make two
146 important and interrelated points, both of which have to do with the location of our research. The
147 Czech Republic (as part of Czechoslovakia until 1991) used to be part of the Soviet Bloc. In the

148 social-science hierarchical ordering of research contexts (Tuvikene 2016), this is a Northern social
149 setting ‘with baggage’ in the sense that the provenance of the findings reached in such a context tends
150 to have the effect of constraining their circulation through knowledge-production circuits and limiting
151 their chances of being more generally accepted (Hörschelmann and Stenning 2008; Robinson 2011).
152 The first point is economic determinism and the ensuing negativity that underlies much of the social
153 science research on informal economies in Eastern Europe³ in the past 25–30 years. The second point
154 is the area studies status implicitly assigned to the research carried out in this part of the North
155 (Stenning 2005). Each of these two points tends to devalue findings made in Eastern Europe and to
156 undermine efforts for theorisations. Let us take each of these points in turn.

157

158 In fact, there is a considerable body of literature on East European informal food economies (e.g.
159 Rose and Tikhomirov 1993; Brown and Kulcsar 2001; Hervouet 2003; Pallot and Nefedova 2003a,
160 2003b and 2007; Gabriel 2005; Southworth 2006; Acheson 2007; Alber and Kohler 2008; Ries 2009;
161 Round *et al.* 2010). However, this literature does not frame informal food production and sharing in
162 Eastern Europe as manifestations of diverse economies or alternative food networks, which they do
163 tend to be framed as when the research is conducted in the West. Instead, in East European contexts
164 these practices have predominantly been interpreted as responses to need, poverty and hardship. We
165 acknowledge that these accounts partly owe their framings to the specific historical situation that
166 followed the dismantling of East Europe’s centrally planned economies in the 1990s. However, we
167 would argue that this interpretation has always had limited reach – not only temporally but also
168 geographically. In our view, this conceptualisation has become untenable as the hegemonic framing
169 of the East European informal food-sharing economy. Greater interpretative diversity needs to be
170 introduced into this research area. This article seeks to contribute to this new line of inquiry.

171

172 The negative and essentialising framings of East European informal economies as need-driven and
173 poverty-related strategies that date back to the early 1990s has held a strong and lasting grip on

174 research conducted in this part of Europe. Admittedly, there were some grounds for its invocation in
175 the fields of development studies and economics in the two post-1989 decades. However, to find this
176 account perpetuated in a 2015 review article on diverse economies is striking. Gritzas and Kavoulakos
177 (2015) cast what they call the ‘diverse economies of post-socialist countries’ as a separate category
178 from ‘alternative exchange networks’ (AENs) and ‘alternative food networks’ (AFNs). The latter two
179 categories, implicitly located in Western contexts, are positively valorised as spaces of alterity in
180 which ‘ethical choices for post-capitalist future could be made’ (AENs - Gritzas and Kavoulakos
181 2015, p. 11) and as ‘more or less radical ethical choices’ unearthing ‘the existence of different possible
182 post-capitalist roads’ (AFNs - Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2015, p. 12).

183

184 In contrast to these ethical, progressive and implicitly universal, but in reality Western-context and
185 Western-generated conceptualisations, ‘diverse economies of post-socialist countries’ are in Gritzas
186 and Kavoulakos’s account riddled with poverty, inequality and exploitation and viewed as a means
187 of preserving neoliberalism. According to the two authors, the contradictions and problematic power
188 relations inherent in these economies set a number of constraints on their ethicality and alterity to
189 capitalism. This gloomy interpretation fits an interpretation of post-socialist informal networks as
190 hindering the development of markets (see Thelen [2011] for critique of this reading), rather than as
191 a sign of social resilience, innovation and creativity, which are the framings attributed to them in
192 Western contexts (Lamine 2015). East European informal sharing practices tend to be viewed as part
193 of a unidirectional development process from non-market to market and from informal to formal
194 economies, and from defensive strategies to entrepreneurialism – in short, from tradition to
195 modernity. Tatjana Thelen (2011) identified the lasting influence of János Kornai’s concept of the
196 ‘shortage economy’ in social science studies of post-socialism as a key factor for equating East
197 European informal exchange networks with a means of overcoming shortages. As a consequence,
198 personal relations in socialism and post-socialism tend to be seen as an outcome of necessity - in
199 contrast to interest-free friendships in Western societies.

200

201 In contrast to these accounts, our contention is that Eastern Europe harbours a multiplicity of sharing
202 practices and networks fed by a range of underlying motives. Our study of food-related sharing
203 practices in the Czech Republic shows that non-profit and non-market sharing transactions can be
204 conceived of as ethical choices and alternative spaces. While these practices do not constitute political
205 activism, following Veen *et al.* (2012) we would claim that they are an important form of reflexive
206 behaviours in terms of conscious decisions concerning food. To sum up, these practices are not
207 primarily driven by economic needs but by diverse sets of motivations that may or may not include
208 economic needs.

209

210 A second and interrelated factor that diminishes the status of knowledge generated by research on
211 East European informal food-sharing economies is the general tendency to confine this analysis to
212 the domain of area studies. Studies conducted in the periphery lack the potential to produce novel
213 insights and theorisations. Instead, they are used to merely confirm claims derived from research in
214 the ‘core’ context (Robinson 2003). This article is partly intended as a break from this research
215 tradition. We are inspired to make claims concerning what our research on East European sharing
216 practices can contribute to universal knowledge valid beyond the region by post-colonial critiques of
217 the geopolitics of knowledge production. These include the calls to incorporate work from ‘outside
218 Europe’ (Robinson 2003), from outside ‘Euro-America’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012) or from the
219 South (Connell 2007) in knowledge production in order to ‘decentre the West’ and to extend the range
220 of knowledge-generative contexts. In this respect the article also builds on ideas developed in critical
221 scholarship of post-socialism on the need to challenge the tendency ‘to marginalise the experiences
222 of the non-western world in a discourse of globalisation and universalisation’ (Stenning and
223 Hörschelmann (2008, p. 312) and to decentre universal knowledge claims by highlighting the
224 importance of understanding post-socialist social and cultural practices (Hörschelmann and Stenning
225 2008; Kay *et al.* 2012).

226

227 The article seeks to overcome the stigma often associated with research in non-Western contexts,
228 which are viewed in terms of ‘a lack, an absence, an incompleteness that translates into an
229 “inadequacy”’ (Chakrabarty 2000, cited in Pollard *et al.* 2009, p. 138). We argue that this research,
230 conducted in the East European part of the Global North, ‘contributes to broader debates on
231 understanding an increasing plurality of everyday worlds’ (Kay *et al.* 2012, p. 60) and extends the
232 context within which general concerns such as economic alternatives and transitions to sustainability
233 are explored. In short, we argue that studying informal sharing practices in this region is a ‘hope
234 producing’ endeavour (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2015) that is theoretically equally promising to
235 researching these themes anywhere else.

236

237 To make these claims and to show that insights from the Czech food-sharing economy can travel and
238 be adopted by diverse-economies research in other contexts in the Global North, we need to counter
239 the negativity, the marginal standing and the area studies status of research on East European food-
240 sharing economies. We do this by showing that rather than being a needs-driven practice confined to
241 the struggling rural poor, Czech informal food sharing is a widespread practice adhered to by people
242 from diverse backgrounds (in terms of educational attainment, place of residence, class and income),
243 in which the well-off are as likely to be involved as the disadvantaged.

244 The rest of this article is structured as follows. The next section briefly outlines the research context
245 and method of data collection. The results are then organised into two thematic sections. First, using
246 findings from a large-scale survey conducted in the Czech Republic in 2015, we show that informal
247 food-sharing in Eastern Europe can be a socially and geographically diverse practice rather than a
248 safety net or survival strategy of disadvantaged groups on the margins of society. Second, having cast
249 these practices as characterised by pleasure, generosity and enjoyment, we present a range of insights
250 concerning the functioning of the actually existing sharing economy, including people’s motivations
251 for participating in sharing networks and the size and composition of these networks.

252

253 **Research context and data collection**

254 The findings presented in this paper are based primarily on a large-scale survey and four focus groups
255 conducted in the Czech Republic in 2015. The four focus groups were held between 19 and 31 March
256 2015 in four locations selected to reflect the cultural diversity of the country and its settlement
257 hierarchy: one group was in Brno, the second-largest Czech city, another one was in Hradec Králové,
258 a regional capital, and the other two took place in Písek and Kroměříž, both of which are mid-size
259 towns and district capitals. Two of these locations - Hradec Králové and Písek – are in Bohemia,
260 historically the western part of the Czech lands, and the other two are in the eastern land Moravia.
261 The aim of the focus groups was to elicit respondents' views and experiences of a range of informal
262 economic practices similar to those covered by the survey. Eleven or twelve participants took part in
263 each group. They were recruited by local managers of a polling company hired by the research team
264 in a tender process. The focus group participants as well as the polling company were paid from the
265 research team's budget. The participants received financial compensation for their time in an amount
266 equivalent to approximately 20 euros. The discussions lasted about two hours and were recorded and
267 transcribed. Both the polling company staff and research team members were present.

268

269 The findings from the focus groups provided background knowledge on the forms and motivations
270 of food sharing and enabled the team to refine the questions that would be used in the subsequent
271 nationwide survey, which was conducted by another polling company selected in a tender process.
272 The survey was a standard opinion survey using the quota sampling method. The research team
273 worked with a panel of 301 interviewers who were spread throughout the country and in both urban
274 and rural locations. Each of the interviewers conducted between five and ten (6.84 on average) face-
275 to-face interviews with respondents who met the criteria set by the survey agency so that the resulting
276 quota sample was a representative sample of the Czech population. The quota sample matched the

277 characteristics of the Czech population over the age of 18 established in the 2011 national population
278 census in terms of gender, age, education level, population size of municipality and region of
279 residence.

280

281 The survey was conducted in two rounds. The first round was carried out between 27 April and 5
282 May 2015, and the second round between 12 and 19 June 2015. Each round aimed to receive
283 responses from at least 1,000 respondents. The total number of returned questionnaires was 2058.
284 Thirty-nine identical questions were posed in both rounds. They covered a broad range of topics,
285 including access to land, source of food consumed in the household, the sharing of food and consumer
286 goods, types and extent of mutual help, financial sources used to obtain a house or flat, informal
287 lending of money, motivations for sharing and mutual help practices, and related topics. Most of the
288 questions aimed at understanding the actual behaviour of the sample population targeted the
289 household level as a basic reference unit (i.e. the respondent was asked to comment on the typical
290 food-production or consumption strategies of her or his household). Only data that related to food
291 production, consumption and sharing were used for analyses underpinning the findings reported in
292 this paper. Data were analysed by the SPSS statistical package using contingency tables with the
293 Pearson chi-square test employed to assess the significance of differences between subgroups defined
294 in the tables.

295

296 **The ordinary everyday practice of informal food sharing**

297 As mentioned above, we accept that in some cases non-monetised, informal sharing within social
298 networks in Eastern Europe constituted a response to the hardship and poverty into which some post-
299 socialist societies were plunged by the roll out of neoliberalism. However, as is the case anywhere
300 else in Europe, informal food production and sharing have roots in a more distant past; in the East
301 European case, in the pre-socialist period. While we do not ignore the relevance of economic factors,
302 we know from our experience that this is unlikely to have been the primary motivation. If the informal

303 food economy had been a response to needs, a greater incidence of food growing and sharing would
304 have occurred in poorer, working-class households, particularly those located in the rural periphery.
305 This is emphatically not what we have found.

306

307 An important precondition for food production and sharing food is access to land. By access to land
308 we understand any kind of tenure and any acreage of land that can be used for food production. In the
309 Czech Republic in 2015 forty per cent of households had access to cultivable land. Rural households
310 had greater access to land compared to urban ones, but even in cities with a population over 100,000
311 twenty-five per cent of households had access to cultivable land. In Prague 23 per cent of households
312 had access to land. Overall, 96 per cent of households with access to land used their land for food
313 production. Of the total survey population of 2,058 respondents, 782 households (38 per cent) were
314 found to have been using that land to produce at least some food. These households make up the basic
315 sample of population whose informal food production and sharing habits are studied in this article.⁴
316 Professional farmers were excluded from the sample.

317

318 With the exception of a very small minority of largely self-sufficient households the food produced
319 within a household was found to be only a secondary source of household alimentation, the primary
320 source of food was provided in the form of purchases in the retail sector. However, when viewed as
321 a proportion of overall food consumption, these secondary, non-market sources of food are not
322 insignificant, especially in the case of fruits, vegetables, potatoes and eggs, where household
323 production and received gifts combined account for about 40 per cent of total household consumption
324 (Table 2).⁵ This finding confirms the results of an earlier small-scale, in-depth study of 13 allotment
325 holders in Brno, the second-largest Czech city, in 2014. The allotment holders kept food logs for a
326 six-month period (May – October). The average yield per plot (200 – 250 m²) was 122 kg of fruits
327 and vegetables, which accounted for 46 per cent of the total volume of fruits and vegetables surveyed
328 households consumed during the six-month period (Sovová 2015).

330 **Table 2:** Source of selected types of food in food growing households.

Type of food	Household food self-provisioning	Received gifts/Sharing	Retail sector	Total
Vegetables	34.8	5.8	59.4	100.0
Fruits	32.6	7.6	59.8	100.0
Potatoes	27.9	6.7	65.4	100.0
Eggs	27.4	10.2	62.4	100.0
Meat	8.4	4.3	87.3	100.0
Honey	4.7	22.5	72.8	100.0

331 Notes: Based on respondents' estimates. Only households with access to land and producing some food are
 332 included (N = 782). The figures in the middle three columns represent percentages of total household
 333 consumption of the type of food given in the first column.

334 Source of data: Large scale quantitative survey (N=2058) conducted in April, May and June 2015 in the Czech
 335 Republic. Quota-sampling method makes the data representative of the country's population.
 336

337 A portion of household production of food is shared with others (outside the household). The
 338 information on the amount of shared food in our survey was based on respondents' estimates. To
 339 analyse the informal sharing economy we divided the surveyed sample into four subgroups (see Table
 340 3 for the description of the groups) according to the degree of their involvement in food-sharing
 341 practices. In the survey we defined sharing as non-monetary exchanges or gift-giving outside the
 342 respondents' household. Understood in this way, sharing is a common practice: 64 per cent of food-
 343 producing households shared at least a small portion of their produce. Twenty-five per cent of all
 344 food-growing households shared between a tenth and a quarter of their produce, and 12 per cent of
 345 households shared more than a quarter of their produce. If all households were included irrespective
 346 of their access to land or food production, 14 per cent of all Czech households surveyed were sharing
 347 at least one-tenth of their domestic food production (Table 3).

348 **Table 3:** Subgroups of households defined on the basis of the extent of food production and sharing.

Category	Definition of the category	Number of households (absolute figures)	Percentage of food-growing households in category	Percentage of households in category (sample in total)
(1) Sharing 1/4+	Households sharing 1/4 or more of their domestic food production while at the same time their domestic produce meeting at least 50 per cent of their yearly consumption in at least one of the following items: vegetables; fruits; potatoes; meat; eggs; honey; conserved food.	92	11.8	4.5
(2) Sharing 1/10+	Households sharing between 1/10 and 1/4 of their domestic food production while at the same time their domestic produce meets at least 25 per cent of their yearly consumption in at least one of the items given above.	199	25.4	9.7
(3) Sharing less than 1/10	Households sharing less than 1/10 of their domestic food production while at the same time their domestic produce meets at least 10 per cent of their yearly consumption in at least one of the items given above.	209	26.7	10.2
(4) Not sharing	All other households with access to land and producing some food	282	36.1	13.7
Sample of food growing households	All households with access to land and producing some food.	782	100.0	38.0
Total survey sample	All households which took part in the survey	2 058	n/a	100.0

349 Source of data: Large scale quantitative survey (N=2058) conducted in April, May and June 2015 in the Czech
350 Republic. Quota-sampling method makes the data representative of the country's population.
351

352 The extent of food self-provisioning and sharing, both in terms of the number of people involved and
353 the proportion of self-provisioning in the overall food supply, is remarkable and suggests that there
354 is a thriving informal food economy in the Czech Republic.⁶

355

356 The sharing of home-grown food is a common activity in Czech society. There are no statistically
357 significant differences in the extent of sharing (as defined in Table 3) among subgroups of
358 respondents based on class, education and income. The only social or demographic characteristic that
359 significantly divides the sample population is age, with sharing being more common in older
360 generations than among the young. While it may be tempting to interpret this difference as an effect
361 of the older generation's experience of the socialist 'shortage economy' and the younger generation's

362 greater reliance on the market, we venture an alternative interpretation. We suggest that sharing food
363 – and related domestic food production – is not primarily a habit lingering from the past but is rather
364 a pleasurable activity that tends to be more common among time-rich older generations.

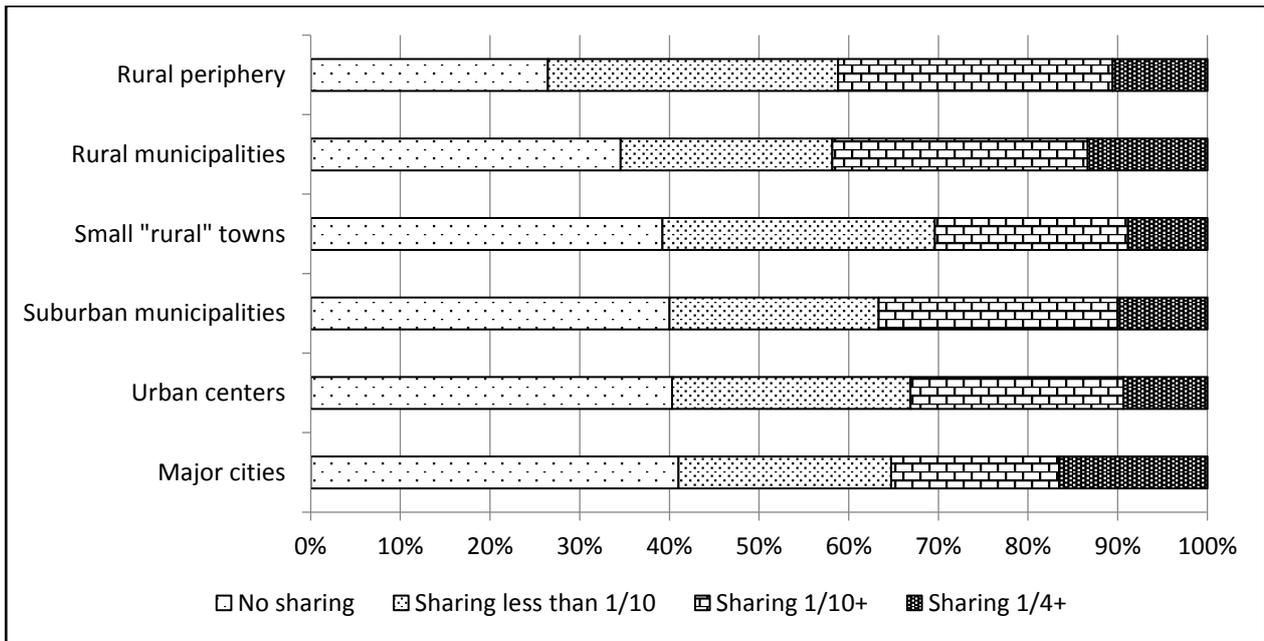
365

366 The geographical distribution of sharing of home-grown food in the Czech Republic offers a further
367 argument for rejecting the thesis that this behaviour is primarily driven by economic need. The post-
368 socialist transformation of the Czech economy has led to an increase in regional inequalities, with
369 Prague and some other metropolitan regions attracting most investment and undergoing rapid
370 economic development, while rural and some peripheral regions dependent on extractive and heavy
371 industries have lagged behind (Hampl 1999 and 2007). If food self-provisioning and sharing were
372 coping strategies, they would be concentrated in the rural and peripheral regions that have seen
373 marginal benefits from the economic transformation.

374

375 To understand the geography of food sharing, we sorted the respondents into six groups along a rural
376 – urban continuum (Figure 1). We defined Prague and other cities with a population over 50,000
377 inhabitants as ‘major cities’. ‘Rural periphery’ denotes municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants
378 located outside metropolitan regions. If the total sample population is considered (N = 2058), food
379 self-provisioning and sharing are more commonly practised in rural settlements than in urban areas.
380 However, this is only because rural and non-metropolitan households have greater access to land.
381 When only households with access to land and growing food are included, the differences in sharing
382 behaviour among geographical categories are negligible. There are no major discernible trends in
383 food-sharing behaviour among households in different types of settlements⁷ (Figure 1). There are no
384 significant regional differences either.

385



386

387

388

Figure 1: The extent of sharing domestically produced food in different types of geographical location.

389

Notes: Only households with access to land and producing some food were included (N=782).

390

'Major cities' were defined as cities with population over 50,000. 'Urban centres' are towns with population between 5,000 and 50,000. 'Suburban municipalities' are settlements located in the vicinity of either of the above categories. 'Small rural towns' are urban municipalities located outside metropolitan regions. 'Rural municipalities' are settlements with population between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants, while 'rural periphery' are municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants located outside metropolitan regions.

395

Source of data: Large scale quantitative survey (N=2058) conducted in April, May and June 2015 in the Czech Republic. Quota-sampling method makes the data representative of the country's population.

397

The widespread character of informal food sharing and its even distribution across a range of social

398

sectors and geographical contexts of Czech society suggest that, contrary to the prevailing

399

interpretations in the current literature on informal food sharing in Eastern Europe, these practices

400

can be viewed as representing alternative food networks and manifestations of informal economies

401

which are not a response to scarcity and deprivation. Extending this argument beyond the Czech

402

Republic and the East European region, we would argue that there is potential for the societies in the

403

Global North – even for societies that have recently experienced rapid economic growth and affluence

404

– to sustain and benefit from non-market sharing economies.

405

406

Food sharing practices: pleasure, altruism and generosity

407

Having established that informal food sharing can be considered a variant of alternative food

408

networks and a component of the diverse economy, we will now take a closer look at its workings.

409 There is evidence that non-economic motives are what primarily sustain this alternative, informal
410 sharing economy. The two most frequently cited reasons for household food self-provisioning are
411 that people want food that is fresh and healthy. Economic motives ('saving money') are important,
412 but they are far from dominant: they are a primary motivation for domestic production only for one-
413 fifth of food-growing households. Significantly, the financial motivation of producing food is cited
414 more frequently by respondents who do not themselves produce food, than it is by food self-
415 provisioners. For the latter, the 'hobby' motive for growing food is just as important as the financial
416 one, and far more important than is assumed by those who do not have personal experience of growing
417 food. While household food production is often more environmentally sustainable than market
418 production (Taylor and Taylor Lovell 2014; Kumar and Nairn 2004), the environmental motivation
419 is clearly the least important reason for both subgroups of respondents.⁸

420

421 To explore whether informal food sharing contains an element of reflexive, ethical behaviour, the
422 respondents' behaviour was compared to their responses concerning the significance of several
423 human values in their lives. Following Judith de Groot and Linda Steg (2008), we selected eight
424 principal human values, four of which are indicative of an egoistic value orientation (social power,
425 authority, social influence, wealth) and four that are indicative of an altruistic value orientation
426 (peace, equality, helping others, social justice). After classifying the results into the categories
427 'Sharing 1/4+', 'Sharing 1/10+', 'Sharing less than 1/10' and 'No sharing' (Table 3), no significant
428 differences in the frequency of answers were found in the case of egoistic values. In other words,
429 these values can be considered to be evenly distributed in society irrespective of respondents'
430 participation in food-sharing networks. However, the distribution of answers was uneven in three out
431 of four altruistic values: social justice, equality and helping others. These values were expressed as
432 'extremely important' by a disproportionately large number of respondents coming from the
433 'Sharing 1/4+' households (the category with the highest levels of sharing). Moreover, when food-

434 producing households were compared with non-producing households, social justice was a
 435 significantly more important value for food-growing respondents.⁹

436 Among food growers who share a significant proportion of their produce with others (i.e. more than
 437 one-tenth) utilitarian reasons such as the fulfilment of obligations or maintaining good social ties are
 438 less important than the ‘joy of pleasing other people’ and ‘feeling good about giving a gift’ (Table 4).
 439 These are followed by more general ethical reasons (‘it is good when people can help...’, ‘to help
 440 people in need’). The enjoyment of pleasurable social ties based on sharing food is also a significant
 441 reason for sharing. ‘Feeling good’ was a strong motivation, particularly for those food growers who
 442 share a significant proportion of their produce with others (Share 1/10+; Table 4). The desire to please
 443 other people by sharing food with them is captured in the following quote from the Brno focus group:

444 We bought an old house with old apple and plum trees. We give plums to our neighbours and
 445 they bring back a bottle of the home-made brandy they make from them. And then there is a
 446 sort of exchange among neighbours....without asking her, our neighbour will come round and
 447 bring us beetroots. And another neighbour got a large cut of wild boar meat and didn’t know
 448 what to do with it, so he shared it with his neighbours. We benefited too....it was cooked, we
 449 got some goulash (focus group, Brno, 25 March 2015).
 450

451 **Table 4:** Motivations for sharing home grown food (comparison of households sharing at least 1/10
 452 of their produce with those sharing less or sharing nothing).

Reasons given for sharing domestically produced food	People sharing more than 1/10 of produce	Sharing less than 1/10 of produce and sharing nothing	Total
Joy of pleasing other people	21.0	23.0	22.0
Feeling good about giving a gift	21.0	11.7	16.4
It is good when people can help each other	15.1	17.0	16.0
To keep good relations with friends and neighbours	13.1	13.4	13.2
To enjoy time with friends	8.9	8.5	8.7
To show the results of my labour	7.2	8.1	7.7
To help people in need	7.9	7.4	7.7

Obligation: to give something in return	3.4	4.6	4.0
Other reasons	2.4	6.3	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Sample size	291	283	574

453 Notes: The column values significantly different from one another (using z-test) are emboldened. The sample
454 is limited to food growing households which gave reasons for their involvement in this practice (N=574).
455 Respondents were asked to choose three reasons from a pre-selected list. The structure of reasons given in the
456 first order is shown in the first column of the table.
457 Source of data: Large scale quantitative survey (N=2058) conducted in April, May and June 2015 in the Czech
458 Republic. Quota-sampling method makes the data representative of the country's population.
459

460 Social networks based on mutuality (reciprocity and obligation) are typically viewed as an indicator
461 of economic hardship and as a critical component of household security (Baird and Gray 2014). Our
462 data does not allow us to determine the exact extent of strictly reciprocal exchanges (i.e. the same
463 two households fulfil mutual obligations by giving and receiving food, possibly of approximately
464 equivalent value) that go on in Czech informal food sharing. The hypothetical maximum is 45 percent,
465 as this is the proportion of food-sharing household that both given and receive home-grown food; this
466 figure, however, is probably too high. What we do not know, however, is whether these interactions
467 occur between the same pairs of households on a reciprocal basis. As the majority of sharing
468 interactions are either in the category of receiving only (51 per cent of households participating in the
469 food-sharing economy) or giving only (four per cent), it seems safe to assume that Czech food sharing
470 is a largely non-reciprocal behaviour free from obligations and driven mostly by generosity and
471 altruistic motives (Table 5), as the following quote from a focus group participant illustrates:

472 My former colleague has a house and likes picking mushrooms in the woods...so when in
473 season I get mushrooms from her. In her garden...she has chickens, so I get eggs from her.
474 Both of these things I get for free, I don't pay anything for them (focus group, Hradec Králové,
475 25 March 2015).
476

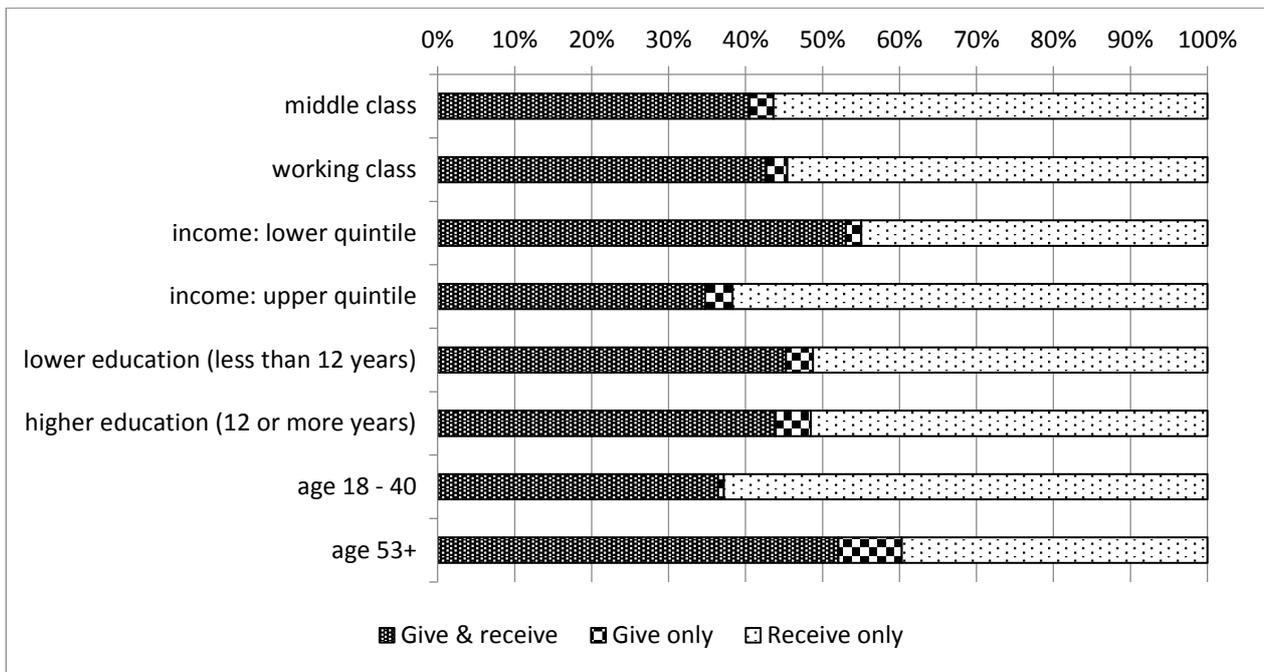
477 **Table 5:** Types of food sharing interactions (only non-monetary inter-household food transfers
478 considered).

Type of transaction: households	Number of households	Percentage (total sample, N = 2058))	Percentage if count only those who share (N=1310)
receive and give	584	28.4	44.6
receive only	673	32.7	51.4
give only	53	2.6	4.0
neither receive or give	748	36.3	n/a
Total	2 058	100.0	100.0

479 Source of data: Large scale quantitative survey (N=2058) conducted in April, May and June 2015 in the Czech
480 Republic. Quota-sampling method makes the data representative of the country's population.
481 Those who give and those who receive food are not in any hierarchical relationship in terms of richer
482 donors giving to poorer recipients. On the contrary, the most affluent households are more numerous
483 than the least affluent ones in the receive-only category and at the same time the least affluent
484 households are more numerous than the most affluent ones in the receive-and-give category. Thus,
485 somewhat counterintuitively, the main beneficiaries of Czech informal food sharing appear to be
486 people who are more affluent (see Figure 2). But the most significant finding is the relatively even
487 distribution of sharing behaviour across all socio-demographic categories. Older people are
488 particularly active in food-sharing networks (when only retirees are considered, 40 per cent of them
489 give and receive food), while younger and middle-class people make up the majority of those in the
490 receive-only category.

491

492



493

494 **Figure 2:** Involvement of social groups in three types of sharing interactions (N=1310).

495 Notes: Households not participating in food sharing were not included in this classification. There were 748
 496 such households in the total sample, or 36 per cent. Class was defined on the basis of the type of employment.
 497 Source of data: Large scale quantitative survey (N=2058) conducted in April, May and June 2015 in the Czech
 498 Republic. Quota-sampling method makes the data representative of the country's population.
 499

500 Food-sharing networks tend to be quite small in size – 61 per cent of networks are made up of just
 501 three or four people, while 20 per cent of the networks consists of five or more members. The
 502 remaining 19 per cent of networks consist of just two people. Family ties are an important element of
 503 these sharing arrangements, but the majority of sharing networks are not based solely on kinship
 504 relations. In 22 per cent of the cases, respondents belonged to sharing networks to which no other
 505 member of their extended family belonged. Just over 65 per cent of the respondents were engaged in
 506 sharing networks in which at least one person was not a member of their extended family.

507

508 The most popular mode of communication in which food sharing is facilitated within these networks
 509 is face-to-face interaction (the first choice in 58 per cent of cases) followed by telephone calls (37 per
 510 cent). Social media and other electronic communication represent only four per cent of the first-choice
 511 means of communication used to facilitate food sharing.

512

513 The dominance of personal, face-to-face communication within sharing networks is reflected in their
514 limited geographical scale. The majority of food-sharing networks are fairly local, as in 81 per cent
515 of cases network members live within 10 kilometres of each other and in 38 per cent of networks they
516 are located within 1 kilometre of each other. In just two per cent of networks the distance between
517 givers and recipients is more than 100 kilometres. There is little variation in the geographical scale
518 of these networks, and age, class and education appear to play no role in their spatial size.¹⁰

519

520 Importantly, there is a strong indication that informal food-sharing networks straddle the urban–rural
521 divide. The fact that the majority of rural food-producing households participating in these networks
522 are both givers and receivers, while the majority of urban households are only receivers, suggests a
523 net flow of home-grown food from rural to urban areas. It is also clear that informal food-sharing
524 networks are not concentrated in a specific geographical or settlement category but are spread across
525 those categories, following the geographical distribution of access to land.

526

527 **Conclusion**

528 Drawing on the study conducted in the Czech Republic our research suggests that in relatively affluent
529 societies of the Global North an extensive informal food-sharing economy – extensive in terms of
530 both the large amounts of home-grown food circulating in sharing networks and the number and
531 diversity of people involved in these practices – coexists alongside the conventional, market-based
532 and monetised food system. We argue that the framings of this informal economy as a residue from
533 the past and a response to hardship, used in much of the existing literature, are inadequate and in need
534 of revision.

535

536 The Czech economy is dominated by the service and industrial sectors and only two per cent of the
537 workforce work in agriculture. However, 38 per cent of households are growing food in their gardens
538 and allotment plots. Household production and sharing of some types of food, mainly vegetables and
539 fruits, are significant in terms of the volume produced and received as gifts. These two sources
540 combined account for two-fifths of the total household consumption of these foods in food-growing
541 households. In most cases these activities are not motivated primarily by economic reasons. The main
542 reason for household food production is the desire to obtain fresh and healthy food.

543

544 Nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) of food-growing households share a portion of their produce with
545 others, while 37 per cent of them give away at least one-tenth of what they produce. Although
546 individual food-sharing networks tend to be small, these networks are widespread: two-thirds of all
547 Czech households are involved in such networks as either providers or recipients, or both. These
548 networks are not concentrated in particular social groups or types of geographical locations; they are
549 evenly spread across social groups and rural and urban settings. The practice of sharing food is equally
550 widespread among richer, well-educated, and middle-class households as it is among poorer, less
551 well-educated, and working-class households. Older people are more active producers and givers of
552 home-grown food, but in our interpretation, supported by findings from the focus groups, this is not
553 necessarily an indication of their economic marginalisation but is rather a sign of the greater amount
554 of time they have to spend on these types of activities which they enjoy doing. The joy derived from
555 the act of sharing and the social contacts that formed out of engaging in the informal exchange of
556 home-grown food were found to be the main motives of sharing. The majority of interactions within
557 these sharing networks are non-reciprocal and non-obligatory. These findings enable us to refer to
558 this set of practices as the ‘actually existing sharing economy’.

559

560 The food-sharing economy uncovered in our research does not represent a politically radical
561 alternative or a form of resistance to the mainstream market economy. Most Czech households buy
562 most of their food in supermarkets or grocery shops, and for them home production is just an
563 additional source of food. Economic motivations cannot be entirely discounted – for one-fifth of the
564 households saving money was the first motivation for producing food at home. The results of the
565 research thus support the idea of a diverse economy where market relations are an important but not
566 the only option, both materially and discursively. Nonetheless, we view the informal food-sharing
567 economy as an alternative to, or perhaps more accurately as an extension of, the concept of market-
568 based alternative food networks (Round *et al.* 2010). Rather than relying on reflexive and politically
569 acting consumers like market-based alternative food networks, the informal, non-market food
570 economy's appeal rests on joy, enjoyment, and non-political, everyday ethical behaviour. In the pre-
571 1989 era these practices may have been a way of escaping into the private realm and achieving
572 everyday normality away from the constant call to political mobilisation (Gille 2010; Novák 2013).
573 In the increasingly affluent post-1989 society it has become an alternative space where economic
574 relations based on positive feelings of enjoyment, helping other people, social justice and
575 strengthening social relations flourish.

576

577 Besides the non-reflexive politics and ethics of home food production and sharing, we should also
578 highlight these practices' non-reflexive environmental and social sustainability, which in previous
579 work was termed 'quiet sustainability' (Smith and Jehlička 2013). While these practices are mostly
580 utilitarian in their intention, driven by growers' desire to obtain fresh and healthy food, to enjoy their
581 hobbies and engage in pleasurable social ties, and not by environmental reasons, the outcomes of
582 these practices have undisputedly positive environmental effects: 45 per cent of food-growing
583 households use only organic fertilisers and another 17 per cent use no fertilisers at all. Home
584 gardening produces food with minimal 'food miles' as it is the shortest possible food-supply chain
585 (Table 6). Even within food-sharing networks the distance travelled by home-grown food tends to be

586 negligible as in four-fifths of the cases the distance between network members is no more than 10
 587 kilometres. These practices are also conducive to social cohesion. Respondents from the most
 588 generous households (i.e. with the highest levels of sharing of home-grown food) identified altruistic
 589 values such as social justice, equality and helping others as extremely important. They also drew a
 590 sense of enjoyment from pleasing other people and good about giving a gift.

591

592 Table 6 introduces a summary of characteristics of the non-market, intrinsic and evolved model of
 593 distribution (sharing) analysed in this article compared with the market-based distribution of food
 594 within AFNs.

595 **Table 6:** Comparison of ideal types of the distribution of food within market based AFNs and within
 596 non-market, evolved sharing networks.

Distribution of food within market-based alternative food networks (AFNs)	Distribution of food within non-market, intrinsic, evolved sharing networks
Socially homogenous, middle class networks	Socially heterogeneous networks
Sales/purchases (market exchange) of high-end food products	Non-market sharing of home grown food
Urban-centred food distribution	Both urban- and rural-centred food distribution plus interactions transcending the rural/urban divide
Politically motivated behaviour, reflexive, ethical	Non-political, non-reflexive, everyday ethicality
Responsibilisation of individual consumers	‘Quietly radical’, networked inclusion
Monetary interactions	Non-monetary interactions
Food re-localisation, short food supply chain	Enhanced food re-localisation, the shortest food supply chain
Reflexive environmental sustainability	Non-reflexive environmental (‘quiet’) sustainability
Mostly impersonal relationships	Personal relationships, social cohesion
Reciprocal interactions	Mostly non-reciprocal interactions

597

598 The findings presented in this article support our claim about the need to reposition research on
 599 Eastern Europe from the ‘area studies’ category to which it has become accustomed to a more central
 600 location in the knowledge production on alternative food systems. Our research challenges the
 601 established hierarchical ordering in the social sciences according to which the main function of the
 602 research conducted in the Eastern periphery of the Global North is to provide confirmation of the

603 general validity of theories formulated in the West. We show that the context in which this more
604 generally valid knowledge is produced needs to be extended beyond the Western core. As the actually
605 existing sharing economy we researched in the Czech Republic is neither a niche practice confined
606 to specific social groups or settings (urban, rural, metropolitan, suburban), nor a coping strategy of
607 large, economically disadvantaged masses, it offers novel and important insights into these everyday
608 practices. This should make the knowledge produced in this context useful for researchers
609 investigating these themes in contexts outside the region of Eastern Europe, in particular in other
610 parts of the Global North.

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624

625 **Notes**

626 ¹ Schupp *et al.* (2016, p. 4) define home gardening as ‘a food provisioning strategy that involves using the physical, social
627 and economic resources of a household to produce food, including vegetables, fruits, berries and herbs. Home gardening
628 is unique from farming in that it generally is found in closer proximity to a residence, involves smaller plots of land and
629 involves a broader diversity of crops. [...] The output of home gardening are generally consumed by the household that
630 produces it.

631 ² In the past several years in the media, policy-making and academia, there has been a surge in the use of terms alluding
632 to fundamental shifts in the economy such as collaborative consumption, solidarity economy, sharing economy or simply
633 sharing. For example, between 2011 and 2015 the Web of Science database listed 2,851 articles with the word ‘sharing’
634 in their titles, a figure almost identical to the number of articles published altogether over the 15 years before that time.

635 ³ One of the anonymous reviewers’ comments compels us to explain our usage of the term ‘Eastern Europe’. We are
636 aware of the dilemmas the use of the term ‘Eastern Europe’ may invoke. We do not use the term in the paper to force
637 unwarranted generalisations concerning this ‘region’. We are aware that despite many similarities (e.g. the widespread
638 nature of food self-provisioning and the social heterogeneity of these practices’ social base in all post-socialist countries)
639 there are likely to be important differences between the meanings and functions of these practices in this highly diverse
640 part of Europe. At the same time, however, on the basis of previous work conducted in Poland (Smith and Jehlička 2013;
641 Smith *et al.* 2015) we are confident that our findings and conclusions apply to at least several other countries in this part
642 of Europe (and, we hope, more widely in the Global North). But the main reason we refer to the Czech Republic as part
643 of Eastern Europe in the paper is that this essentialising categorisation is applied to the country in much of the existing
644 social science research, including many the studies on food self-provisioning. This categorisation tends to diminish the

645 status of knowledge generated in research conducted in and on the Czech Republic and to invalidate the claims to
646 theorisations which are based on this work. In the article we seek to challenge and destabilise this established order of
647 knowledge production.

648 ⁴ Among food-producing households, 71 per cent of respondents work in their plots at least once a week, and another 19
649 per cent of respondents at least once a month.

650 ⁵ Besides food, flowers are also commonly grown in home gardens. Households produce or receive as a gift 55 per cent
651 of the flowers that are used in Czech households, and the remaining 45 per cent are purchased in the retail sector.

652 ⁶ For example, a small-scale research on the practices of 13 allotment-holders in Brno revealed that during the six months
653 of the research period they gave away 16 per cent of the fruits and vegetables (on average 19.5 kg per household) produced
654 on their plots (Sovová 2015).

655 ⁷ The only exception is the significant over-representation of ‘Sharing less than 1/10’ and ‘Sharing 1/10+’ subgroups in
656 the ‘rural periphery’. Thus we cannot claim that sharing food is as common in affluent metropolitan areas as it is in smaller
657 rural settlements. But the absence of any other significant differences between the geographical categories clearly
658 confirms the hypothesis that it is not possible to interpret the large extent of informal food sharing as a survival strategy
659 adopted by the rural population.

660 ⁸ Forty-five per cent of the food-growing households surveyed use only organic fertilisers (such as compost or manure)
661 in their gardens, and another 17 per cent use no fertilisers. Only 38 per cent of households use industrial fertilisers in
662 addition to organic fertilisers, which is significantly less compared to conventional agricultural production.

663 ⁹ The mean values of social justice (and other human values) were computed for each category of respondents. The
664 significance of the difference between means was tested by the one-way ANOVA procedure.

665 ¹⁰ The only divergence from this finding is that a larger proportion of richer and middle-class households receive food
666 from partners that are farther away (more than 10 kilometres) than is the case with other social groups.

667

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