

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

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Abstract

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

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

There is a curious blind spot at the intersection of two currently growing bodies of literature - the frenzy over the 'sharing' alternatives to the mainstream economic model on the one hand and the growing attention given to informal food

provisioning in explorations of transitions to a more sustainable food system on the other. This blind spot relates to the informal, non-market form of the sharing of food produced by households. While long overlooked by research on the re-localisation of the food system in the Global North, home gardening¹ (also referred to as household food production, grow-your-own, or food self-provisioning) is increasingly being recognised by alternative food scholars as an important food-producing social practice (McEntee 2010; Schupp and Sharp 2012; McClintock 2014) and as a significant contributor to the sustainability of the agrifood system (Schupp *et al.* 2016). However, various non-market, informal forms of *distributing* home-grown food, ranging from gift-giving and sharing to exchanging, remain on the margins of alternative food scholarship's interest (Kneafsey *et al.* 2008; Goodman *et al.* 2012).

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

In many respects, the lack of literature on the informal sharing of home-produced food in the Global North seems striking. There has been a long-standing interest in the social sciences in alternative exchange networks, an interest that goes back to the countercultural 1960s (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016). Since the early 2000s there has been a resurgence of interest in the social sciences in sharing and sharing economies.² Drawing on the body of work on alternatives to mainstream thinking on development (Gold 2004) and on the concept of the diverse economy (Gibson-Graham 1996), the interest in sharing was initially carried by hopes and euphoria about the capacity of this 'third perspective on capitalism and consumerism' (Heinrichs 2013) to minimise resource use, disrupt the mainstream economy, erode consumerism and foster social cohesion (Hamari *et al.* 2015).

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

Taking inspiration from Gibson-Graham's (2008) understanding of performativity and Gibson *et al.*'s (2010) point about the importance of representation for how the future is imagined, this article responds to these recent trends regarding the sharing economy by focusing on informal, non-market, non-monetary and mostly non-

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' facili- tated by for-profit platform- based companies	The 'collective economy' of co-production and open sourcing in business

platform forms of localised sharing of home-grown food. Compared to sustained research efforts on this and similar types of sharing in development studies and social anthropology (e.g., Baird and Gray 2014; Gurven *et al.* 2015), research on the informal sharing of home-grown food in the Global North remains rare (but see Kamiyama *et al.* [2016] for a recent account of the sharing of home grown food in rural Japan). Informal sharing practices in the Global South are typically researched in the context of livelihood strategies, safety nets and the transformation of 'traditional economies' towards 'standard' market relations. In the context of the Global North the discursive hegemony of the mainstream capitalist economy renders these types of economic interactions 'invisible' as they are deemed residual and marginal and hence inappropriate for 'developed' societies. Even in the context of the research on what Gritzas and Kavoulakos (2016, p. 924) call the 'hidden neverland' of Northern alternative practices (innovative alternative economies and alternative economic exchanges) informal sharing practices are overshadowed by the focus on innovative market-based economic alternatives, such as community-supported agriculture and solidarity purchasing groups.

We find the negative framing of informal food practices (as lacking and residual due to their association with poverty and coping strategies) problematic. Instead we propose viewing them in a positive light as practices that extend food provisioning beyond conventional market interactions and as practices that have a role in strengthening social cohesion, environmental sustainability and food re-localisation (Fraňková 2015). We adopt an inductive approach to our research and seek to derive some preliminary insights into the workings of an informal food sharing economy in the Global North. In our effort to present these practices as important alternatives in the Global North we drew inspiration from a broad stream of literature that highlights sharing's significant social and environmental benefits and its transformative potential. The first source is J. K. Gibson-Graham's (2008) concept of the diverse economies in which a broadly defined form of non-market sharing (as gifts and barter) is the prominent component. The second source is Duncan McLaren and Julian Agyeman's (2015) inclusive conceptualisation of sharing as the 'sharing paradigm' which encompasses both communal and commercial forms of sharing (see Table 1). Here we were inspired by these authors' enthusiasm for sharing's transformative potential reflected in their claim that practices of sharing may constitute 'the seeds of a

potentially post-capitalist society' (McLaren and Agyeman 2015, p. 8). And the third source is Russell Belk's seminal work on defining sharing in relation to the concepts of gift and exchange (Belk 2010). Belk's delineations of three prototypes of economic behaviour are useful to us for two reasons. First, despite the emphasis placed on precision and distinctions in the descriptions of the three prototypes of economic interactions, Belk recognises that in the real world the two types of non-market interactions – gift and sharing – form a continuum rather than being mutually exclusive. At the same time, market-based exchange is clearly a separate type of economic interaction. Second, Belk highlights the importance of gift and sharing for social reproduction, underlining their role in nurturing trust and cooperation.

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

In this article we are concerned with non-commercial, non-monetised, informal practices of distribution involving home-grown food on the continuum that includes both sharing and gift-giving in the sense of Belk's (2010) definitions of these terms. We know from previous research (Smith and Jehlička 2013) that while people in everyday situations often do not distinguish between these two non-market categories of economic interaction, they are clearly aware of their distinction from market exchanges. In practice these non-market transactions take a range of hybrid forms between the ideal notion of sharing and the ideal notion of gift-giving. However, their common denominator is that they take place outside the market and they are not motivated by profit-making. In the remainder of the article we will refer to all forms of sharing and gift-giving as sharing.

Extending knowledge on informal food sharing

The overarching goal of this article is to contribute to Gibson-Graham's endeavour (2008) to make visible once hidden alternatives in order to develop alternative futures. Drawing on research conducted in the Czech Republic, the article's goal is to shed light on how the non-market sharing economy that is invisible, but nonetheless exists in the Global North, operates. We look at the types and volumes of food people share, the size and social composition of sharing networks and the degree of their localness. We identify the social backgrounds of food donors and recipients and their motivations for sharing, including the relative importance of mutual obligations in these interactions. We also link diverse levels of involvement in sharing networks to value orientations and the social backgrounds of people involved in these networks.

As the research draws primarily on data from a quantitative survey and to some extent from the focus groups, our findings reveal general patterns and provide only initial insights into the informal food-sharing economy. Further and more qualitatively oriented research will be needed to develop more nuanced accounts of causalities and explanations of the findings outlined in this article.

Prior to delving into the exploration of the Czech food-sharing economy we need to make two important and interrelated points, both of which have to do with the location of our research. The Czech Republic (as part of Czechoslovakia until 1991) used to be part of the Soviet Bloc. In the social-science hierarchical ordering of research contexts (Tuvikene 2016), this is a Northern social setting ‘with baggage’ in the sense that the provenance of the findings reached in such a context tends to have the effect of constraining their circulation through knowledge-production circuits and limiting their chances of being more generally accepted (Hörschelmann and Stenning 2008; Robinson 2011). The first point is economic determinism and the ensuing negativity that underlies much of the social science research on informal economies in Eastern Europe³ in the past 25–30 years. The second point is the area studies status implicitly assigned to the research carried out in this part of the North (Stenning 2005). Each of these two points tends to devalue findings made in Eastern Europe and to undermine efforts for theorisations. Let us take each of these points in turn.

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

The negative and essentialising framings of East European informal economies as need-driven and poverty-related strategies that date back to the early 1990s have held a strong and lasting grip on research conducted in this part of Europe. Admittedly, there were some grounds for their invocation in the fields of development studies and economics in the two post-1989 decades. However, to find this account perpetuated in a 2015 review article on diverse economies is striking. Gritzas and Kavoulakos (2016) cast what they call the ‘diverse economies of post-socialist countries’ as a separate category from ‘alternative exchange networks’ (AENs) and ‘alternative food networks’ (AFNs). The latter two categories, implicitly located in Western contexts, are positively valorised as spaces of alterity in which ‘ethical choices for post-capitalist

future could be made' (AENs – Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016, p. 927) and as 'more or less radical ethical choices' unearthing 'the existence of different possible post-capitalist roads' (AFNs – Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016, p. 928).

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

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

A second and interrelated factor that diminishes the status of knowledge generated by research on East European informal food-sharing economies is the general tendency to confine this analysis to the domain of area studies. Studies conducted in the periphery lack the potential to produce novel insights and theorisations. Instead, they are used to merely confirm claims derived from research in the 'core' context (Robinson 2003). This article is partly intended as a break from this research tradition. We are inspired to make claims concerning what our research on East European sharing practices can contribute to universal knowledge valid beyond the region by post-colonial critiques of the geopolitics of knowledge production. These include the calls to incorporate work from 'outside Europe' (Robinson 2003), from outside 'Euro-America' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012) or from the South (Connell 2007) in knowledge production in order to 'decentre the West' and to extend the range of knowledge-generative contexts. In this respect the article also builds on ideas developed in critical scholarship of post-socialism on the need to challenge the tendency 'to marginalise the experiences of the non-western world in a discourse of

globalisation and universalisation' (Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008, p. 312) and to decentre universal knowledge claims by highlighting the importance of understanding post-socialist social and cultural practices (Hörschelmann and Stenning 2008; Kay *et al.* 2012).

The article seeks to overcome the stigma often associated with research in non-western contexts, which are viewed in terms of 'a lack, an absence, an incompleteness that translates into an "inadequacy"' (Chakrabarty 2000, cited in Pollard *et al.* 2009, p. 138). We argue that this research, conducted in the East European part of the Global North, 'contributes to broader debates on understanding an increasing plurality of everyday worlds' (Kay *et al.* 2012, p. 60) and extends the context within which general concerns such as economic alternatives and transitions to sustainability are explored. In short, we argue that studying informal sharing practices in this region is a 'hope producing' endeavour (Gritzas and Kavoulakos 2016) that is theoretically equally promising to researching these themes anywhere else.

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

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

Research context and data collection

The findings presented in this article are based primarily on a large-scale survey and four focus groups conducted in the Czech Republic in 2015. The four focus groups were held between 19 and 31 March 2015 in four locations selected to reflect the cultural diversity of the country and its settlement hierarchy: one group was in Brno, the second-largest Czech city, another one was in Hradec Králové, a regional capital, and the other two took place in Písek and Kroměříž, both of which are mid-size towns and district capitals. Two of these locations – Hradec Králové and Písek – are in Bohemia, historically the western part of the Czech lands, and the other two are in the eastern land Moravia. The aim of the focus groups was to elicit respondents'

views and experiences of a range of informal economic practices similar to those covered by the survey. Eleven or 12 participants took part in each group. They were recruited by local managers of a polling company hired by the research team in a tender process. The focus group participants as well as the polling company were paid from the research team's budget. The participants received financial compensation for their time in an amount equivalent to approximately 20 euros. The discussions lasted about two hours and were recorded and transcribed. Both the polling company staff and research team members were present.

The findings from the focus groups provided background knowledge on the forms and motivations of food sharing and enabled the team to refine the questions that would be used in the subsequent nationwide survey, which was conducted by another polling company selected in a tender process. The survey was a standard opinion survey using the quota sampling method. The research team worked with a panel of 301 interviewers who were spread throughout the country and in both urban and rural locations. Each of the interviewers conducted between five and ten (6.84 on average) face-to-face interviews with respondents who met the criteria set by the survey agency so that the resulting quota sample was a representative sample of the Czech population. The quota sample matched the characteristics of the Czech population over the age of 18 established in the 2011 national population census in terms of gender, age, education level, population size of municipality and region of residence.

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

The ordinary everyday practice of informal food sharing

As mentioned above, we accept that in some cases non-monetised, informal sharing within social networks in Eastern Europe constituted a response to the hardship and poverty into which some post-socialist societies were plunged by the roll out of neo-liberalism. However, as is the case anywhere else in Europe, informal food production and sharing have roots in a more distant past; in the East European case, in the

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

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

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

pre-socialist period. While we do not ignore the relevance of economic factors, we know from our experience that this is unlikely to have been the primary motivation. If the informal food economy had been a response to needs, a greater incidence of food growing and sharing would have occurred in poorer, working-class households, particularly those located in the rural periphery. This is emphatically not what we have found.

An important precondition for food production and sharing food is access to land. By access to land we understand any kind of tenure and any acreage of land that can be used for food production. In the Czech Republic in 2015 40 per cent of households had access to cultivable land. Rural households had greater access to land compared to urban ones, but even in cities with a population over 100,000 25 per cent of households had access to cultivable land. In Prague 23 per cent of households had access to land. Overall, 96 per cent of households with access to land used their land for food production. Of the total survey population of 2,058 respondents, 782 households (38 per cent) were found to have been using that land to produce at least some food. These households make up the basic sample of population whose informal food production and sharing habits are studied in this article.⁴ Professional farmers were excluded from the sample.

With the exception of a very small minority of largely self-sufficient households the food produced within a household was found to be only a secondary source of household alimentation, the primary source of food was provided in the form of purchases in the retail sector. However, when viewed as a proportion of overall food consumption, these secondary, non-market sources of food are not insignificant, especially in the case of fruits, vegetables, potatoes and eggs, where household production and received gifts combined account for about 40 per cent of total household consumption (Table 2).⁵ This finding confirms the results of an earlier small-scale, in-depth study of 13 allotment holders in Brno, the second-largest Czech city, in 2014. The allotment holders kept food logs for a six-month period (May – October).

The average yield per plot (200 – 250 m²) was 122 kg of fruits and vegetables, which accounted for 46 per cent of the total volume of fruits and vegetables surveyed households consumed during the six-month period (Sovová 2015).

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

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

The sharing of home-grown food is a common activity in Czech society. There are no statistically significant differences in the extent of sharing (as defined in Table 3) among subgroups of respondents based on class, education and income. The only social or demographic characteristic that significantly divides the sample population is age, with sharing being more common in older generations than among the young. While it may be tempting to interpret this difference as an effect of the older generation's experience of the socialist 'shortage economy' and the younger generation's greater reliance on the market, we venture an alternative interpretation. We suggest that sharing food – and related domestic food production – is not primarily a habit lingering from the past but is rather a pleasurable activity that tends to be more common among time-rich older generations.

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

To understand the geography of food sharing, we sorted the respondents into six groups along a rural – urban continuum (Figure 1). We defined Prague and other cities with a population over 50,000 inhabitants as 'major cities'. 'Rural periphery' denotes municipalities with less than 2000 inhabitants located outside metropolitan regions. If the total sample population is considered (N = 2058), food self-provisioning and sharing are more commonly practised in rural settlements than in urban areas. However, this is only because rural and non-metropolitan households

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 the category	Percentage of households in category (total sample)
(1) Sharing 1/4+	Households sharing 1/4 or more of their domestic food production and whose domestic food production meets at least 50 per cent of their yearly consumption of 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 and whose domestic food production meets at least 25 per cent of their yearly consumption of at least one of the items listed above.	199	25.4	9.7
(3) Sharing less than 1/10	Households sharing less than 1/10 of their domestic food production and whose domestic food production meets at least 10 per cent of their yearly consumption of at least one of the items given above.	209	26.7	10.2
(4) No sharing	All other households that have access to land and produce some food	282	36.1	13.7
The sample of food-growing households only	All households that have access to land and produce some food.	782	100.0	38.0
The total survey sample	All households which took part in the survey	2058	n/a	100.0

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

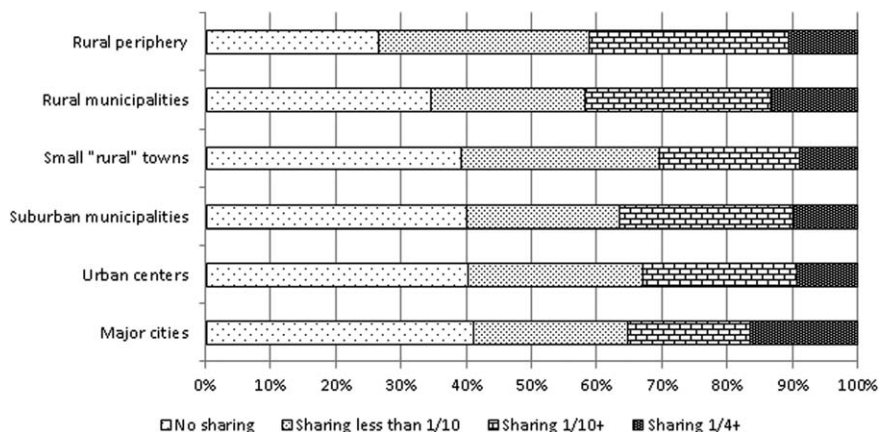


Figure 1: The extent of sharing domestically produced food in different types of geographical location. Notes: Only households with access to land and producing some food were included ($N=782$). 'Major cities' were defined as cities with population over 50,000. 'Urban centres' are towns with population 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. 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

have greater access to land. When only households with access to land and growing food are included, the differences in sharing behaviour among geographical categories are negligible. There are no major discernible trends in food-sharing behaviour among households in different types of settlements⁷ (Figure 1). There are no significant regional differences either.

The widespread character of informal food sharing and its even distribution across a range of social sectors and geographical contexts of Czech society suggest that, contrary to the prevailing interpretations in the current literature on informal food sharing in Eastern Europe, these practices can be viewed as representing alternative food networks and manifestations of informal economies which are not a response to scarcity and deprivation. Extending this argument beyond the Czech Republic and the East European region, we would argue that there is potential for the societies in the Global North – even for societies that have recently experienced rapid economic growth and affluence – to sustain and benefit from non-market sharing economies.

Food sharing practices: pleasure, altruism and generosity

Having established that informal food sharing can be considered a variant of alternative food networks and a component of the diverse economy, we will now take a

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

To explore whether informal food sharing contains an element of reflexive, ethical behaviour, the respondents' behaviour was compared to their responses concerning the significance of several human values in their lives. Following Judith de Groot and Linda Steg (2008), we selected eight principal human values, four of which are indicative of an egoistic value orientation (social power, authority, social influence, wealth) and four that are indicative of an altruistic value orientation (peace, equality, helping others, social justice). After classifying the results into the categories 'Sharing $\frac{1}{4}+$ ', 'Sharing $\frac{1}{10}+$ ', 'Sharing less than $\frac{1}{10}$ ' and 'No sharing' (Table 3), no significant differences in the frequency of answers were found in the case of egoistic values. In other words, these values can be considered to be evenly distributed in society irrespective of respondents' participation in food-sharing networks. However, the distribution of answers was uneven in three out of four altruistic values: social justice, equality and helping others. These values were expressed as 'extremely important' by a disproportionately large number of respondents coming from the 'Sharing $\frac{1}{4}+$ ' households (the category with the highest levels of sharing). Moreover, when food-producing households were compared with non-producing households, social justice was a significantly more important value for food-growing respondents.⁹

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

We bought an old house with old apple and plum trees. We give plums to our neighbours and they bring back a bottle of the home-made brandy they make from them. And then there is a sort of exchange among neighbours... without asking her, our

Table 4: Motivations for sharing home-grown food (comparison of households sharing at least 1/10 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 maintain 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

Notes: The column values that are significantly different from one another (using z-test) are in bold. The sample is limited to food-growing households that gave reasons for growing food (N = 574). Respondents were asked to choose three reasons from a pre-selected list. The structure of primary reasons indicated is in the first column of the table.

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

neighbour will come round and bring us beetroots. And another neighbour got a large cut of wild boar meat and didn't know what to do with it, so he shared it with his neighbours. We benefited too... it was cooked, we got some goulash. (focus group, Brno, 25 March 2015)

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

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

Type of transaction: households	Number of households	Percentage (total sample, N = 2058)	Percentage if only those who share are counted (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 nor give	748	36.3	n/a
Total	2 058	100.0	100.0

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

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

Those who give and those who receive food are not in any hierarchical relationship in terms of richer donors giving to poorer recipients. On the contrary, the most affluent households are more numerous than the least affluent ones in the receive-only category and at the same time the least affluent households are more numerous than the most affluent ones in the receive-and-give category. Thus, somewhat counterintuitively, the main beneficiaries of Czech informal food sharing appear to be people who are more affluent (see Figure 2). But the most significant finding is the relatively even distribution of sharing behaviour across all socio-demographic categories. Older people are particularly active in food-sharing networks (when only retirees are considered, 40 per cent of them give and receive food), while younger and middle-class people make up the majority of those in the receive-only category.

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

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

The dominance of personal, face-to-face communication within sharing networks is reflected in their limited geographical scale. The majority of food-sharing networks

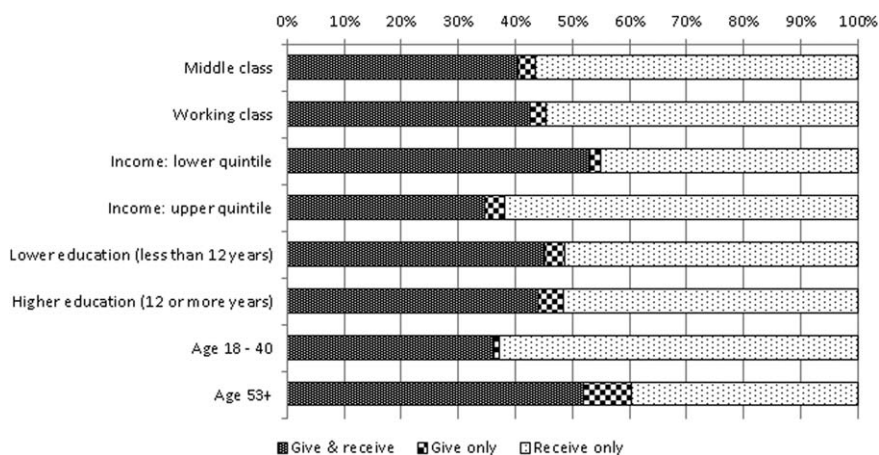


Figure 2: *Involvement of social groups in three types of sharing interactions (N = 1310).* Notes: Households not participating in food sharing were not included in this classification. There were 748 such households in the total sample, or 36 per cent. Class was defined on the basis of the type of employment. 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

are fairly local, as in 81 per cent of cases network members live within 10 kilometres of each other and in 38 per cent of networks they are located within 1 kilometre of each other. In just two per cent of networks the distance between givers and recipients is more than 100 kilometres. There is little variation in the geographical scale of these networks, and age, class and education appear to play no role in their spatial size.¹⁰

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

Conclusion

Drawing on the study conducted in the Czech Republic our research suggests that in relatively affluent societies of the Global North an extensive informal food-sharing economy – extensive in terms of both the large amounts of home-grown food circulating in sharing networks and the number and diversity of people involved in these practices – coexists alongside the conventional, market-based and monetised food system. We argue that the framings of this informal economy as a residue from the

past and a response to hardship, used in much of the existing literature, are inadequate and in need of revision.

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

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

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

Table 6: *Comparison of the ideal types of distribution of food within market-based AFNs and within 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 homogeneous, 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

an alternative space where economic relations based on positive feelings of enjoyment, helping other people, social justice and strengthening social relations flourish.

Besides the non-reflexive politics and ethics of home food production and sharing, we should also highlight these practices' non-reflexive environmental and social sustainability, which in previous work was termed 'quiet sustainability' (Smith and Jehlička 2013). While these practices are mostly utilitarian in their intention, driven by growers' desire to obtain fresh and healthy food, to enjoy their hobbies and engage in pleasurable social ties, and not by environmental reasons, the outcomes of these practices have undisputedly positive environmental effects: 45 per cent of food-growing households use only organic fertilisers and another 17 per cent use no fertilisers at all. Home gardening produces food with minimal 'food miles' as it is the shortest possible food-supply chain (Table 6). Even within food-sharing networks the distance travelled by home-grown food tends to be negligible as in four-fifths of the cases the distance between network members is no more than 10 kilometres. These practices are also conducive to social cohesion. Respondents from the most generous households (i.e., with the highest levels of sharing of home-grown food) identified altruistic values such as social justice, equality and helping others as extremely important. They also drew a sense of enjoyment from pleasing other people and feeling good about giving a gift.

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

The findings presented in this article support our claim about the need to reposition research on Eastern Europe from the 'area studies' category to which it has become accustomed to a more central location in the knowledge production on

alternative food systems. Our research challenges the established hierarchical ordering in the social sciences according to which the main function of the research conducted in the Eastern periphery of the Global North is to provide confirmation of the general validity of theories formulated in the West. We show that the context in which this more generally valid knowledge is produced needs to be extended beyond the Western core. As the actually existing sharing economy we researched in the Czech Republic is neither a niche practice confined to specific social groups or settings (urban, rural, metropolitan, suburban), nor a coping strategy of large, economically disadvantaged masses, it offers novel and important insights into these everyday practices. This should make the knowledge produced in this context useful for researchers investigating these themes in contexts outside the region of Eastern Europe, in particular in other parts of the Global North.

Notes

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

² In the past several years in the media, policy-making and academia, there has been a surge in the use of terms alluding to fundamental shifts in the economy such as collaborative consumption, solidarity economy, sharing economy or simply sharing. For example, between 2011 and 2015 the Web of Science database listed 2851 articles with the word 'sharing' in their titles, a figure almost identical to the number of articles published altogether over the 15 years before that time.

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

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

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

- ⁶ For example, a small-scale research on the practices of 13 allotment-holders in Brno revealed that during the six months of the research period they gave away 16 per cent of the fruits and vegetables (on average 19.5 kg per household) produced on their plots (Sovová 2015).
- ⁷ The only exception is the significant over-representation of 'Sharing less than 1/10' and 'Sharing 1/10+' subgroups in the 'rural periphery'. Thus we cannot claim that sharing food is as common in affluent metropolitan areas as it is in smaller rural settlements. But the absence of any other significant differences between the geographical categories clearly confirms the hypothesis that it is not possible to interpret the large extent of informal food sharing as a survival strategy adopted by the rural population.
- ⁸ Forty-five per cent of the food-growing households surveyed use only organic fertilisers (such as compost or manure) in their gardens, and another 17 per cent use no fertilisers. Only 38 per cent of households use industrial fertilisers in addition to organic fertilisers, which is significantly less compared to conventional agricultural production.
- ⁹ The mean values of social justice (and other human values) were computed for each category of respondents. The significance of the difference between means was tested by the one-way ANOVA procedure.
- ¹⁰ The only divergence from this finding is that a larger proportion of richer and middle-class households receive food from partners that are farther away (more than 10 kilometres) than is the case with other social groups.

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