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Diverging temporalities of care work on urban farms: Negotiating history, responsibility, and productivity in Lithuania

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ABSTRACT

While scholars have developed a nuanced understanding of agriculture as a form of care, the temporal organization of farming practices has received little consideration. Focusing on how farmers organize and experience agriculture, we track diverging approaches to care work on urban farms in Vilnius, Lithuania. Our ethnographic fieldwork and interviews show how Lithuanian urban farmers are struggling to reconcile the civic ideals of the global urban farming movement with their historical understandings of care for specific plants and the land. Whereas the older generation views farming as kinship-based individualized work focusing on particular plants and garden ecologies, the younger generation approaches it as a way to unwind, mediate, and build a community. These different perspectives on farming translate into divergent temporalities of care in which productivist goals rooted in socialist self-provisioning practices and embodied in orderly landscapes encounter new trends of agricultural care manifested in the natural aesthetics of the farms. We examine dynamic tensions between the two farming modalities by linking them to different understandings of moral commitments and responsibilities for plants and land. Through the lens of temporality, we also show how these divergent care modes are themselves grounded in gender inequalities reproduced on the farms and enabled by by the welfare state institutions, including maternity leave and retirement policies.

1. Introduction

A growing number of scholars have begun conceptualizing farming as a form of care for plants, soil, and ecosystems (Hartigan, 2017; Law, 2010; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; van Dooren et al., 2016). In this view, agricultural practices are understood as relational, inter-species activities that demand from farmers stewardship and moral and emotional commitments, as well as skills and embodied experiences (Mol et al., 2010; Singleton, 2010; cf. Ginn, 2014). The care approach has been particularly productive for understanding farming subjectivities in alternative agro-food economies such as small-scale and subsistence agriculture, gardening, urban farming, and other areas where ethical, symbolic, and cultural considerations feature centrally in the farming experience (Holloway, 2002; Krzywoszynska, 2015; Pitt, 2018).

As nuanced and insightful as this scholarship is, it often overlooks the role of temporalities in shaping agricultural activities due to seasonal and diurnal rhythms, wildlife and microorganism reproduction cycles, and worker schedules (cf. Bingham, 2008). Even when scholars consider temporalities in their analyses of agricultural care, as Puig de la Bellacasa (2015) did in a brilliant analysis of the slow pace of soil restoration vis à vis scientific models aimed at increasing productivity, they nevertheless present ahistorical and universalizing accounts of temporal practices (cf. Richardson-Ngwenya, 2012). Yet agriculture does not exist in a vacuum: it is shaped by historically situated normative understandings of what constitutes "good" care for the land and "correct" ways of farming—and who is expected to perform those activities (Sayre, 2011; 2003). Without considering the temporal organization of care practices and locating them within specific contexts, we cannot fully understand what constitutes stewardship, skills, or even care for the plants, soil, and ecosystems.

To address this gap, we apply a temporalities perspective to an empirical case study of urban farming in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania. We study the temporal organization of care on the farms and how various planned farming and social activities map onto plant growth cycles and seasons. We also consider the volunteer farmers' subjective experiences of farming and situate them in the broader historical context and memory of self-provisioning in the region. As in the rest of Eastern Europe, Lithuania relied on urban and peri-urban self-

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provisioning schemes to enable generations of locals to survive the tumultuous history of two world wars, transitions into and out of socialism, neoliberal privatization reforms throughout the 1990s, and entrance into the European Union in the early 2000s (Bellows, 2004; Borčić et al, 2016; Hormel, 2017; Pungas, 2019; Smith and Jehlička, 2013; Varga, 2017a; Zavisca, 2003). Our analysis reveals how these historical experiences of caring for the plants and land intersect with contemporary urban farming work in Lithuania. More specifically, our analysis yields two insights. First, we show how older and more experienced farmers approach farming as an individualized caring practice embedded in kinship relationships, while the younger generation considers farming as a communal activity that provides a break in their busy schedules. We suggest that these different approaches translate into divergent modalities of care, each with its own understandings of productivity, relationships to nonhuman nature, and landscaping aesthetics (cf. Bartkienė et al., 2019: 59). Our second finding underscores the role of broader political and social institutions in the temporal organization of urban farming in Lithuania: we show how generous maternity leave and early retirement policies have created a temporal template for performing gendered agricultural care work, which reproduces gender inequalities on the farms.

We collected our data in 2017 during seven months of ethnographic fieldwork in Vilnius. In addition to participant observations and long-term engagements with volunteers, organizers, and other stakeholders in the movement, we conducted 19 semi-structured interviews whom we recruited from primarily one farm using the snowballing method (Noy, 2008). We interviewed 15 women and 4 men, ranging in age as follows: 21–30 years old (n = 3); 31–40 years (n = 7); 41–50 years (n = 5); 51–60 years (n = 2); and 71–80 years (n = 2). The age and gender disparities in our interviewee pool as well as their belonging to the middle- and upper-middle social class reflect general trends documented in the urban farming movement both in Eastern Europe (Borčić et al., 2016; Spilková and Rypáčková, 2019) and beyond (Jarosz, 2011; Reynolds, 2014; Trauger, 2004). As is common in ethnographic research, we analyzed the data using a recursive approach of rereading and categorizing interview transcripts to identify patterns and make conceptual connections across the narratives. We found that historical memory and concerns with scheduling of tasks, seasonal rhythms, and growth cycles feature centrally in how the farmers' approach their volunteering on urban farms. In this regard, using temporality as an analytical framework provides us not only with a new vantage point for understanding the politics and practice of agricultural care, but also an emic perspective on urban farming.

After reviewing the relevant scholarship in the following section, we describe the history of urban and peri-urban food self-provisioning in the Baltic region during the socialist and early post-socialist periods and introduce the institutional organization of the current urban farming movement in Lithuania. Next, we show how urban farmers conceptualize their farm work in terms of responsibility, commitments, and expertise, and map these views onto the temporal organization of care work on an urban farm. We conclude with a discussion of political and social implications of the diverging forms of care, along with how the coronavirus pandemic may shape them in the future.

2. Temporalities of Nature and Agricultural Work

Temporality has increasingly been employed as an analytical category in political ecology, geography, anthropology, and related fields. In contrast to the 1990s literature that focused on the social and cultural dimensions of temporality, such as time–space compression (Harvey, 1982) or the rise of modern time consciousness (Thrift, 1981), recent temporality research is increasingly concerned with the mutual constitution of the social and biological worlds (Arnall and Kothari, 2015; Duvall, 2011; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). These analyses have provided new ways of thinking about modern societies in planetary and geological time scales (Hill, 2015) that were captured in such concepts as anthropocene (Yusoff, 2013) and capitalocene (Moore, 2015, 2017). They have also enabled us to conceptualize capitalism as a temporal order which superimposes a particular organization on daily life and work (Thompson, 1967) that runs counter to biological rhythms (Fisher, 2016; Hébert, 2015; Li, 2017).

From a temporalities perspective, capitalism, socialism, and post-socialism all have different templates for everyday life, engagements with nonhuman nature, and relationships to the past and future political imaginaries. Focusing on the socialist experience, scholars often emphasize the slow pace of everyday life (Bren, 2002; Ilic and Leinarte, 2015). Verdery (1996) argues that because the socialist state kept its citizens physically suspended in lines waiting to buy basic necessities, it appropriated their personal time, resulting in what she calls the etatization of time. In the agricultural sphere, Lampland (1995) documents how the efforts of the socialist state to measure work hours in Hungary commodified agricultural labor on collective farms, turning the work into slow-paced drudgery. Others have discussed the dynamic and fast-paced lives of urbanites and farm workers who used every opportunity to work in the kitchen gardens, allotment plots (dachas), and subsidiary farms from which they personally benefited (Caldwell, 2011; Mincyte, 2009; Ries, 2009).

Not surprisingly, the end of socialism in the early 1990s scrambled the material and temporal organization of everyday life (Gille, 2016). In contrast to the linear, teleological accounts of history under capitalism and socialism, post-socialism is defined by both its relation to the past and its rupture from that past (Atanasoski and Vora, 2018; Kaneff, 2004; Pupovac, 2010). A state of transition and liminality with no clear endpoint, post-socialism is characterized by a disjointed historical temporality that relies on interruptions, breaks, and digressions in the progression of time (Blagojević and Timotijević, 2018: 79; Chelcea and Druță, 2016; Ringel, 2016). These contradictions gave birth to the unusual social status of the urban peasant, who while being a subject of the modern state is nevertheless tied into the seasonal rhythms of growth and decline (Mamonova et al., 2013; cf. Clarke et al., 2000).

Conceptually, the temporality perspective draws on two schools of thought: new materialism and the Marxian approach. New materialism emphasizes human engagement with the material world through the dialectical and open-ended interactions with nonhumans (Haraway, 2007; Latour, 1993; Pickering, 1995; cf. Coole and Frost, 2010). By emphasizing the material dimension of social and economic life (e.g. Desai and Smith, 2018; Tsing, 2015), this view moves beyond the anthropocentrism that tends to dominate otherwise insightful analyses of the social organization of work and interactions with nature. At the same time, following from Marxian critiques of capitalism, temporality considers the processes through which capital flows structure individuals' work, leisure, and everyday life patterns in distinctly capitalist ways. Marxian analyses approach social and economic relations as path-dependent and thus emphasize their embeddedness in history. They also underscore how popular imaginaries of the past, future, and present serve as political blueprints that determine who is and is not valuable and where policies and capital investments should be directed (Ferry and Limbert, 2008; Weszkalnys, 2014).

How do these complementary temporal insights help us understand agricultural care? Scholars studying agricultural care understand it as a choreographed set of practices (Law, 2010) aimed at "maintenance, continuation, and repair of the farming 'world'" (Krzywoszynska, 2015: 289, paraphrasing Fisher and Tronto, 1991; Tronto, 1993). Organized around the logic of care (Mol, 2008), this view considers agricultural work as a more-than-human ethics: a relational approach that embraces interdependencies among species and envisions pathways towards a more sustainable common future (Hartigan, 2017; van Dooren et al., 2016; cf. Doody et al., 2014; Power, 2005).

This understanding of agricultural care can be complicated by applying a temporalities perspective that considers the broader structural processes and historical contexts in which care is situated. These approaches echo the work of feminist scholars studying alternative food

networks, who note that self-provisioning is time-intensive and often adds a third shift to the already demanding schedules of working women (Castellano 2016; Deutsch 2011). It has also been shown that agricultural care work is relegated to the margins of the agro-food system (Sumner and Llewelyn, 2011; Trauger, 2004) and is typecast as women's natural calling (Mies, 1986). Ecofeminists have been particularly critical of the historically rooted cultural processes and institutional arrangements that devalue and exploit both women's care work and the reproductive capacities of nature (see DiNovelli Lang et al., 2018). From a temporalities perspective, agricultural care is time-intensive, feminized work embedded in a long history of gender inequality and exploitation but also a subjective experience of slowing down, self-caring, and unplugging from capitalist tempos (Jarosz, 2011; Trauger, 2004).

The following sections will consider how these insights can deepen an understanding of the social organization of agricultural care work on urban farms by considering two divergent ethos of farming in Vilnius that coexist in both micro arrangements of work practices on the farms and macro considerations of historical time, capitalist tempos, and biological cycles.

3. History of Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture in Lithuania

Urban gardening as a form of agricultural self-provisioning has been important throughout the history of the Baltic region. While small-scale producers dominated rural and peri-urban landscapes in Lithuania in the 1920s and 1930s, the second Soviet occupation in 1944 overwhelmingly transformed the political and economic organization of agricultural work by nationalizing and collectivizing agricultural production. Often overlooked in the analyses of socialist agriculture, self-provisioning played a key role in the socialist food supply chains (Shmelev, 1986; Varga, 2017a). Employees of collective and state farms were assigned subsidiary farms of 60 ares (approx. 1.5 acres) and were required to raise pigs, cows, and poultry near their homes (Hedlund, 1989; Žakevičiūtė, 2016). Meanwhile, starting in the mid-1950s most urban workers were issued individual allotments known as "collective gardens" (*kolektyviniai sodai,* or simply *sodai*), and in Russian as *dachas* (Kalinkin, 1981; Khiliuk, 1966). While in name these gardens were designated as "collective," they operated as relatively autonomous individual units with clearly demarcated boundaries (Šiupšinskas et al., 2016; Borčić et al., 2016). The regulations in Soviet Lithuania limited the size of *sodai* to 6 ares (approx. 0.15 acres) within city limits and 12 ares (approx. 0.3 acres) elsewhere. Located in urban and peri-urban areas, these plots were generally accessible by public transportation, but often required considerable traveling time for the gardeners. Nevertheless, the vast majority of urban households maintained enormously productive *sodai* as a vital source of food (Galtz, 2000; Zaviska, 2003). Gardeners grew a wide variety of produce, from staple root vegetables to tomatoes and cucumbers (which required handmade greenhouses); to strawberries, gooseberries, currants, and quince; to traditional fruits such as apples, pears, plums, and sour cherries. In addition, all urban residents who had access to even the smallest urban land plots or had a few square feet of land around their private home practiced self-provisioning and managed to supply their households with food for most of the year (Caldwell, 2011; Ries, 2009). Not only did gardeners use their urban plots to supplement their diets, but these hard-working cultivators were also celebrated as productive members of the socialist society. According to Lowell (2003: 165), a man who managed to produce 2.5 tons of vegetables from his 150-square-meter (0.004-acre) plot was extolled in the media as a socialist hero and example for others to follow.

Seeking to produce an extraordinary amount of food on their allotments, gardeners drew on the generations' old knowledge of how to tend for plants and the land. Like Krzywoszynska's (2015) vineyard workers, whose experiential knowledge is central to performing care for the vines, the socialist gardeners were intimately aware of soil quality and drainage capacity in different parts of their small *sodai* and understood how to promote soil aeration using earthworms, to control moles and other pests, and to rotate plants for greater fertility; how much sunshine (and rain) each variety needed; which vegetables grew best in what parts of the plot; how to graft and prune trees; and how to make homemade fertilizers; among many other complex calculi (Galtz, 2000). In this sense, their approach to caring for the land was productivist but differed significantly from industrial agricultural paradigms. Rather than seeking to increase productivity using intensive technologies and biochemical solutions, as is common in industrial agriculture, they attended to and aligned themselves with natural rhythms to maximize the performance of their carefully arranged ecological assemblages.

From the perspective of the socialist state, caring for *sodai* was considered as "active leisure;" that is, a time dedicated for productive activities contributing to the well-being of the whole socialist society (Lowell, 2003: 165; Wegren, 1998). Yet the gardeners saw cultivation of *sodai* as a private endeavor, even as they looked for ways to carve out time to work on the gardens by manipulating work schedules through an intricate system of favors from their bosses and coworkers.

In this sense, gardens were important not only for sustenance, but also for identity-building and one's sense of status. A number of scholars have commented on gardening as a site of cultural consumption, "where the design, maintenance and conspicuous display of plants and associated elements can be attributed to one's pride and status" (Doody et al., 2014: 124; Chevalier, 1998). Even commercial farmers who ostensibly are interested only in the utilitarian value of their farms do in fact judge other farmers by the appearance and quality of their crops, not financial gains: "the main difference between a farmer who was perceived by the community as a 'good farmer' and a 'bad farmer' was the quality of the crops and livestock produced as judged by two principal criteria – the physical appearance or attractiveness of the crop (or animal) and crop yield per acre/hectare (or weight/quality per animal)" (Burton, 2004: 201). Burton (2004) then goes on to explain why the farmers who associate "neat, clean and ordered" (201) landscapes with being a good farmer resist yielding their fields to conservation projects that are potentially more gainful financially, but create messy and unruly landscapes (212) (see also Nassauer, 1995).

Researchers writing about Lithuania, too, find that land played a significant part in how gardeners saw themselves and others; how they understood care, stewardship, and responsibility for the land; and how they constructed their relationship with the natural environment (Šiupšinskas et al., 2016; for parallels in other Baltic states, see Schwartz, 2006; Pungas, 2019). Similarly as in the above studies of gardening and farming, socialist gardeners judged each other—and themselves—by their success as food producers and by how orderly, weed-free, and well-tended their gardens were. In practice this meant that gardening involved a careful choreography of planning and planting, along with long hours of weeding, doing other routine maintenance, and beautifying their gardens with flowers around the perimeter. It reveals that gardening was a deeply individualized experience of interactions with plants and land ecologies as well as a site for cultivating identities and reproducing social status values. The continued importance and power of such agricultural aesthetics in post-socialist Eastern Europe was documented in Varga's (2019) analysis of land use patterns in Ukraine where smallholders let other farmers use their land for free just to prevent neighboring farmers from encroaching on their property. In this sense, keeping their land in production—and well-taken care of—has been an exercise in boundary-making and re-assertion of one's identity as a steward.

Not surprisingly, the socialist ideals of a "good gardener" diverge significantly from the logic of urban farming in Europeanizing Lithuania's cities. As part of the restoration of private property rights in the early 1990s, all gardens were privatized and Lithuania's gardeners were issued land and property titles, making them owners of their plots. Although during the early years of the post-socialist transformations,

food self-provisioning continued to play a key role in sustaining both rural and urban populations (Blumberg, 2015; Swinnen, 1999; Varga, 2017a), Lithuania's accession to the European Union in 2004 opened the doors to European agricultural markets as well as new ideas about land and environmental stewardship. Because of race-to-the-bottom food politics in the European markets, relatively cheap produce from Spain flooded Lithuania's supermarkets, challenging the economic survivalist logic of self-provisioning (Hormel, 2017; Caldwell, 2019). Moreover, because of tight labor markets and low pay, many Lithuanians sought second jobs, making it more difficult to find time to look after their gardens (Southworth, 2006). At the same time, popular cultural ideas of land use introduced a new repertoire of landscaping practices in which vegetable beds were replaced with manicured lawns (Klimas and Lideika, 2018). Consequently, while many urbanites, particularly older ones, continue cultivating *sodai* and growing food in their backyards, food self-provisioning has been tapering off in urban and peri-urban areas.

It was in this historical moment that a new wave of the urban agriculture movement has taken root in Vilnius. Rather than being organized for self-provisioning at the individual household level, as *sodai* were, these farms depend on collective work arrangements and harvest sharing. Instead of focusing on specific plants and land plots, they seek to address global environmental concerns and build communities (Bartkienė et al., 2019: 59–62). In contrast to earlier generations of urban gardeners who dedicated themselves to and had intimate knowledge of farming, volunteers in the new initiatives tend to approach farming as a civic and sometimes as a leisure activity, and many have few cultivation skills. In a sense, two urban agriculture models are currently operating side-by-side. Yet as distinct as these two worlds of urban agriculture are, they do overlap when younger volunteers buy or inherit *sodai* from their parents or older farmers join new initiatives and bring their knowledge and ideas about what it means to look after plants and care for the land. To understand the temporal organization of agricultural work on the new urban farms, in the following section we consider the institutional framework that enabled the formation of these initiatives (Table 1).

Table 1
Timeline of urban and *peri*-urban agriculture in Lithuania.

1944 – 1950	*Intense Sovietization*
	Collectivization of farms, private property abolishment
	Establishment of individual subsidiary farms
	Civil war, food requisitions, famine
	Collective forms of labor on state and collective farms
1950 – 1990	*Socialist Era*
	Establishment of *sodai* (dachas) based on employment
	Intense self-provisioning on *sodai* and kitchen gardens
	Kinship-based intergenerational agricultural work
	Local ecological knowledge
	Orderly aesthetics, productivism
1990 – 2004	*Post-socialist Era*
	Land property restitution/privatization of *sodai*
	Liberalization, removal of subsidies and price controls, inflation, unemployment, de-industrialization
	Prevalence of smallholder agriculture, self-provisioning
	Individual and family-based agricultural work, productivism
2004 – Present	*Europeanization*
	Voluntary formation of urban farms
	Civic and environmental values
	Farming as mediation, self-realization, and freedom from kinship-based intergenerational commitments
	Communal work
	Organic landscape designs, post-productivism

4. Urban Farming in Lithuania: Visions and Institutions

The idea of establishing urban farms in Lithuania was spearheaded in 2011 by members of Žali.Lt (Lith., Green.Lt), a local nongovernmental organization affiliated with the global green movement. These efforts occurred in the context of the broader embrace of sustainability as a future development project of European cities. In this vision, Lithuanian cities are reimagined as prosperous and green and their residents as environmentally conscious Europeans (Dzenovska, 2013). In an interview with us, Tomas explained his decision to get involved in urban farming as a way of practicing tactical urbanism, a global movement aimed at making cities more sustainable and accessible to average residents:

> I have been interested in social innovations, including tactical urbanism, that encourages approaching the city from the perspective of a pedestrian or a cyclist. It invites people to alter local infrastructures so that they are better suited to meet their needs, use public spaces in innovative ways, and generate various social activities… One of the interesting topics I read about was the idea of cultivating urban farms on rooftops and in abandoned lots; they were aimed to spread ideas and educate the public. For example, there was a garden in London called Pharmacy garden that… focused on growing medicinal herbs and sold tea from a nearby truck, but at the time nothing like that was available here [in Lithuania]. (Tomas, 47 yo, 8\31\2017)[1]

Like many other farmers who either had lived in or frequently visited other European capitals, Tomas envisioned Vilnius and other Lithuanian cities as spaces that would generate new public sociality, foster creativity, and enable social entrepreneurship. This view is notably different from that of gardeners who own and cultivate existing *sodai*. In this sense, these visions manifest a post-socialist rupture from the socialist value of gardening as a subsistence activity (cf. Goszczyński and Wróblewski, 2020).

The vision of creating a sustainable future through urban farms has not only mobilized a group of forward-looking environmentally conscious residents in Vilnius, but also motivated the Ministry of the Environment to provide seed funding for establishing the farms. In collaboration with community volunteers and a local cultural center, Žali.Lt managed to establish four urban agriculture initiatives in Vilnius over the course of three years. Some other efforts occurred in Kaunas and Klaipėda.

In comparison to urban farms in the West, Lithuanian "urban farms" are small-scale gardening projects (approx. 10 ares or 0.25 acres), but both have a common mission and commitment to addressing environmental and social issues. "Gardens," or *sodai,* denotes a private space used for subsistence cultivation for personal benefit, which is distinct from the conception of an "urban farm" as part of the global urban agriculture movement.[2]

While initially successful, all four gardens struggled to attract new volunteers, and by the summer of 2017 only one urban farm remained fully operational. (This is the farm from which most of our data comes.) One of the main attractions of this farm was a large greenhouse that had belonged to a former hospital. From a temporalities perspective, the greenhouse extends the growing season beyond the warmest summer months. The longer growing season not only enables the farmers to produce more food, but also attracts volunteers who are eager to join the garden in early spring and fall, when school is in session and few people travel on vacation. The older farmers also emphasize the sense of privacy that the greenhouse proves by creating a "natural cover" from passers-by to see who is working on the farm. As gardeners did in socialist and post-socialist *sodai*, the urban farmers focus on growing

[1] All translations by authors.

[2] Because the organizers themselves use "urban farm" when describing their endeavors to English-speaking audiences on social media, we refer to them as urban farms (for more classifications of urban agriculture see Ackerman, 2011; Cohen et al., 2012; McClintock, 2014).

tomatoes and cucumbers in the greenhouse. In the adjacent outdoor plot, they also cultivate various herbs, salad greens, chili peppers as well as vegetables such as pumpkins, sweet potatoes, carrots, radish, and kale. There are also various decorative plants and flowers.

Around 20 participants contribute to the urban farm every year. They meet or use a group e-mail list to decide collectively what to plant and where, and how to coordinate work tasks and share the produce. They are also savvy users of social media, particularly Facebook, where they publicize activities. As is true of urban farms around the world, the Lithuanian urban farm often becomes a site for socializing and entertainment, offering a welcome break from daily work pressures (Jarosz, 2011; cf. Rosol, 2011). The farm calendar is filled with numerous events such as seasonal food tastings, picnics, barbeques, season opening festivities, and harvest celebrations.

Most of the participants are women, but the composition and numbers of each cohort fluctuate from year to year due to turnover. Two distinct groups of women have, however, been consistent volunteers: young mothers and retirees. The presence of these groups signals not only the gendered dimension of agricultural care work, which we delve deeper into later in the paper, but also the role of universal maternity leave and relatively early retirement ages in providing time for volunteering.

Parental leave in Lithuania enables mothers or fathers to receive 100% of their average salary (calculated over the 12 most recent months) to raise their child for the first year and 40% of the salary for the second year. Men are just starting to use this benefit (7% of men take leave in the first year and 38% in the second), but the vast majority of new mothers opt to stay at home, at least for the first year (Sodra, 2019). During this period women often look for activities to engage in, especially ones that enable them to spend time outdoors. Many respondents mentioned that it was the birth of a child that enabled them to join an urban farm, and mothers with older children can continue volunteering at the long-lasting urban farm because it is located in a large park with a nearby playground for the children to play while their parents work on the farms. Tomas believes that the farm is attractive to young mothers because it "gives them an opportunity to do something [creative and productive], but also because they seek to grow [healthy] vegetables for their young children" (Tomas, 47 yo, 8\31\2017). Similarly, one of the founders of a spin-off urban farm/food workshop explains her decision to start the initiative thusly: "Right after giving birth to my second child, I wanted to be part of something, to contribute to the neighborhood; that's why I collaborated with others to start the workshop. It's all about kids and the community. … I recently ran into another mother who just had her third child and she was also eager to join us" (Saulė, 40 yo, 9\2\2017).

Similarly, retired women join the garden to be productive and do something they find meaningful. Lithuanian laws guarantee social security benefits after 15 years of contributions, but most people opt to wait until they reach the full retirement age of 62 years, 4 months for women and 63 years, 8 months for men. At this age, many retirees are still active and pursue personal interests such as traveling, taking on part-time jobs, providing childcare for their grandchildren, or joining clubs and associations, with urban gardening as an attractive option.

Hence, although often overlooked in studies of urban farming, state welfare policies can be important in making the required volunteers available. In contrast to the critiques of the welfare state as undermining self-reliance and discouraging individual initiative, these examples strongly suggest that the effects of such policies emanate far beyond individual benefits. By providing social benefits, these polices create time for volunteering and engaging in activities that contribute to the public good.

5. Negotiating Responsibility and Productivity on Urban Gardens

One of the most frequent themes threading through our interviews connects contemporary urban farming in Lithuania to the long agricultural history in the region. Unlike the disjuncture between modern lifestyles and the agrarian past typical of Western European and North American urban farms, all farmers we interviewed in Lithuania mentioned at least in passing that their families came from the countryside and that generations of their ancestors survived thanks to farming:

> Lithuania is a farmers' land, everyone has a connection to farming. We are very close to the land, either our grandparents or parents have farms and gardens.… There are only a handful of true urbanites in the country, and it is nearly impossible to find anyone who hasn't gardened. (Saulė, 40 yo, 9\2\2017)

Another farmer echoes this sentiment: "In the United States and other Western countries, people are born and spend their entire lives on the asphalt. It is fascinating that they would be interested in gardening. … Here in Lithuania it is obvious: we all are from the land" (Aušra, 75 yo, 7\20\2017). In these popular imaginaries, the agrarian past has persisted through changing political climates: no one mentioned the major land reforms that repeatedly disrupted rural livelihoods during Lithuanian independence following World War I, Nazi and Soviet occupations, crumbling of collective farms at the end of socialism, and privatization of land in the post-socialist era. Even as they embrace the Western model of urban farming, these farmers cling to an idealized agrarian past as one the cornerstones of national identity.

At the same time, most of the urban farmers we interviewed note that these historically rooted experiences of farming pose challenges for the contemporary urban farming movement in Lithuania. Having had first-hand experiences of farming, many urbanites are wary of the responsibilities that caring for the plants and land entail. In their view, gardening on *sodai* and farming in the countryside are synonymous with obligatory hard physical labor. During our interviews many urban farmers described how as children they had had little patience or appreciation for gardening because their parents and grandparents forced them to work on *sodai* during summer vacations. One farmer states: "Many people in Lithuania can't even look at gardens because they have been required to help on *sodai* and farms since childhood" (Saulė, 40 yo, 9\2\2017). Even if some farmers enjoyed gardening as children, they felt obliged to help their elders and closely obey their directions, which left little space for creativity or engaging with the process: "I spent my summers on my grandmother's *sodai*. I was told what to do and I did it, but I didn't know why. I didn't have any sense of what I was doing. … You have to weed here, prop up the plant there, but it wasn't clear why. My grandmother said so [and I was expected to do it] (Lina, 27 yo, 8\24\2017).

Echoing Lina's story, many farmers and organizers alike cited childhood gardening memories as the main reason why urban farms in Lithuania have failed to attract more volunteers. One farmer went so far as to suggest that these experiences of gardening traumatized the current generation of urbanites who are now reluctant to join the farms:

> The fact that we are [only] the second generation from the land is the main obstacle to the urban farming movement in Lithuania. It is a form of trauma; people remember how as children they were forced to weed entire potato fields [when spending their summers] at their grandmothers' or slaved watering vegetables on *sodai* during the weekends. For the vast majority of people gardening is not about meditation, a healthy lifestyle, or the appreciation for the results of their work. Rather, it is associated with coercion and forcing one to carry out work that is dirty, difficult, and never-ending. People do not understand that communal [urban] farming is not based on coercion. This kind of urban farming is about freedom where one can decide how much time and energy they want to devote to it. (Brigita, 35 yo, 8\28\2017)

Here Brigita reveals how care for the plants and land on urban farms in Vilnius is inseparable from historically grounded experiences of

gardening. In the old paradigm, farming is drudgery with no reprieve in sight. Its timescale is both endless and repetitive: each passing year is defined by family members repeating the same cycle: digging, sowing, weeding, watering, harvesting, and preparing the land for winter. Notably, this form of agricultural care is reproduced through kinship relations and mediated across generations: gardening is an inseparable part of children's obligation to help their parents and grandparents.

As Brigita suggests, the new generation of urban farmers is breaking away from the centuries-old views of farming as centered around the unconditional and deeply intertwined obligations to one's family and hard work. This new vision reconsiders urban farming as a site of creativity and self-realization. Not only are urban farmers invited to enjoy farming activities, they are also freed from kinship-based obligations.

Brigita also suggests that the new urban farming approach is based on a different experience of time. Instead of defining farming in terms of an endless timescale organized around seasonal cycles, the new farming model offers an opportunity to slow down, to be present in the moment, and to meditate (see also Jarosz, 2011; cf. Guthman, 2008). The idea of urban farming as a meditative experience was echoed in other interviews: "The goal of farming for me is meditation with my hands submerged in the soil and maybe some herbs and vegetables. I am not concerned if the harvest is not abundant. … After all we are not an industrial greenhouse but a leisure garden where everybody is free to realize their visions" (Meda, 35 yo, 9/7/17).

While individualized experiences of reflection and self-care are crucial for the farmers, the new urban farm is primarily understood as a communal space. Unlike *sodai* dominated by individual plots, on Lithuania's new urban farms all participants share work responsibilities. This is primarily due to the fact that the farmers are juggling various work- and family-related responsibilities, and sharing work on the farms makes it possible for them to squeeze volunteering into their busy schedules (Bartkienė et al., 2019: 56). In addition to providing an opportunity to slow the pace of modern life, communal farming is understood as an obligation to work together:

> At first there were some people who were skeptical about working collectively; they wanted to be allocated a "square meter" of the land so that they could work it independently, without consulting or collaborating with others. However, through a natural attrition those who did not like the communal work arrangement left the farm and only those gardeners who were comfortable sharing work stayed. (Brigita, 35 yo, 8\28\2017)

The commitment to communal work on an urban farm is important not only because of time constraints; it is also understood as the underlying mission of the farm. In the following quotations a woman in her fifties explains the civic objective of urban farming:

> Urban farming has several functions. In my opinion, one of its most important functions is to build a stronger sense of community in the city because when people meet on the farm they talk not only about growing plants, but also about their lives and hobbies, [and] they start new [environmental] projects. The idea of providing oneself with vegetables is not as important as the opportunity to change the landscape, to change daily routines, and to get involved in civic activities. (Vaida, 54 yo, 9\30\2017)

For Vaida, the vision of urban farming far exceeds the purpose of growing food (Bartkienė et al., 2019: 61; cf. Ančić et al., 2019; Spilková, 2017). It is about strengthening communal ties, getting involved in activities, and engaging in civic life. In place of the historically rooted obligations to one's family and necessity for backbreaking agricultural work, there is a forward-looking vision where urbanites care for each other, their neighborhoods, and the city.

This analysis suggests that, unlike earlier generations of gardeners and farmers whose work revolved around their families and private gardens (reproductive labor), the new farmers approach agricultural care work as a form of self-realization and civic engagement. A collective approach to care work and duties is both a necessity for busy farmers seeking ways to accommodate farming in their schedules and an embodiment of their commitment to building community and promoting the public good. Rather than producing food, they are cultivating community. In terms of temporalities, the old farming paradigm is based on intergenerational obligations within families and cyclical work rhythms that are repeated endlessly. The new urban farmers, on the other hand, see urban farming as a break from both their fast-paced lives and a rupture with the history of hard agricultural labor. Next, we consider the ecological dimension of these diverging approaches to agricultural care work and locate these practices in the broader social context.

6. The Ecological and Gender Dimensions of Agricultural Care

To underscore the difference between the two modalities of caring for farms—the historically grounded individualized care that relies on intergenerational obligations versus the community-oriented care that enables farmers to slow down—it is worth considering the material and ecological implications of the new approach to gardening. In contrast to the *sodai* aesthetics based on order and neatness (Bartkienė et al., 2019: 58), the new urban farmers practice companion gardening, which involves intermixing different plants. This creates a varied botanical tapestry blending different plant species without clear boundaries. While such an approach to growing vegetables is popular in Western Europe and North America, it is quite rare in Lithuania. Giedrė comments on her elderly parents' surprise at such an unusual method of gardening:

> My parents, who live in the countryside, came for a visit, and we all went to the farm. You should have seen their reaction.… They were astonished to see … that there were no clearly designated paths throughout the farm and all the vegetables were mixed together: potatoes planted next to tomatoes, etc. (Giedrė, 30 yo, 8\28\2017)

Giedrė's experience not only reveals how communal ideals and work arrangements translate into different landscaping strategies, but it also highlights the normative dimension of agricultural aesthetics. Taking good care of *sodai* meant farmers performed never-ending hard labor in order to maintain orderly and weed-free plots. Caring for urban farms today entails following less structured gardening designs that communicate the values of creativity, self-realization, meditation, and even casualness.

While all farmers appreciated the sense of freedom to do what they liked on the urban farm, embracing this more relaxed approach to farming was far from easy for the older generation of urban farmers. In the following quotation one retiree expresses her struggles with the new way of gardening that goes against her understanding of what it means to care for the plants:

> When you plant a seedling you have to treat it like a small child—you have to take care of it, look after it, pamper it, and water it. A human being eats three times a day and drinks maybe more than five times. But here [on the farm] nothing was done to [the plants] until July! … All the tomatoes were let go without any pruning—God only knows what fruit they will bear! Those that manage to grow will grow only because of the warm summer [this year] and some residual humidity coming from the nearby bushes…. And you, little plant, you have to fend for yourself trying to survive. You can continue your existence only if somebody will have mercy on you and decide to water you. (Aušra, 75 yo, 7/20/2017)

In equating care for plants with raising small children, Aušra casts farming as a responsibility to meet the needs of each particular plant

(Bartkienė et al., 2019: 57–58). Just as children need timely care, plants cannot wait to be pruned or watered. Notably, she defines her relationship to the plants in kinship terms—plants are young and vulnerable family members who need to be protected, attended to, and pampered. By expanding the kinship domain to include plants, Aušra's approach resonates with the more-than-human ethics that scholars of agricultural care work have articulated (Krzywoszynska, 2015; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2015; cf. Ginn, 2013). Plants are not things to be controlled (the typical view in industrial agriculture), but living entities that must be engaged with through a choreography of care (Law, 2010). Rooted in historical ideas and practices of self-provisioning, this ethics of care is an extension of the farming philosophies employed on *sodai* during and after socialism, when farmers organized their own and their children's lives around plants' biological cycles in order to harvest as many vegetables, fruits, and berries as possible. For gardeners who seek to create neat and orderly landscapes, this is a surprisingly non-anthropocentric approach.

The diverging modalities of care work along generational lines are also linked to the historical identity politics of being proud and caring farmers: a "good farmer" is also a good and responsible person. It is therefore not surprising that elderly women explain their approach to farming using the language of individual responsibility. As Aušra described, "When I joined the farm I noticed that only Marija was coming and working all the time, so I jumped right in to help her" (Aušra, 75 yo, 7/20/2017).

Yet Aušra's commitment to help her sister farmer cannot be fully understood outside of the gendered dimension of agricultural care work. As the voluminous scholarship on this topic suggests, farming and gardening are key sites where gender inequalities are produced and reinforced (Sachs, 1996; Wegren et al., 2010). In Eastern Europe these norms derive from divisions of labor in socialist households (Lakhtikova et al., 2019). While Lithuanian women and men worked together on most tasks, men were expected to take care of the soil by applying compost, preparing the beds, and watering the plants; they also pruned and grafted bushes and trees. Most of the men's time, however, went into building and maintaining the greenhouse structures and small houses that were built on the gardens (Hormel, 2017). Women, meanwhile, did all of the weeding; sowing/planting of seedlings; tending of vegetables, berries, and flowers; and gathering and processing of the harvests (Pine, 1993, 1996; cf. Caldwell, 2019). They did all of this in addition to their dual roles as "worker-mothers" (Ashwin, 2002): working full-time jobs and performing a disproportionate amount of work as "wives/partners, (lone) mothers, providers of care/health/education, and participants in public life" (Reiter, 2010: 532). To be a "good gardener-woman" meant to do it all: to supply one's family with food; maintain aesthetically pleasing, weed-free gardens; and be a good citizen. In this respect, Aušra relied on her lifelong role as a "good woman" to recognize that a lot of work needed to be done on the farm, and she felt compelled to help Marija do it.

At the same time, the gendering of care work continues to be reproduced in the organizational structures on urban farms. Women continue performing the overwhelming majority of tasks, particularly routine care such as weeding. Not only do they do the bulk of the care work, but these routine tasks are also understood as their natural calling. A male participant explained gender roles and agricultural work divisions thusly:

> I am not a farmer and I am not inclined to plant [vegetables], but I do help with organizing various events or watering the plants. I see myself more as a gardener and an overseer, not as a weed picker. Of course, one should not differentiate between male and female work, but weeding is more a woman's job because it requires diligence. There are, of course, men who like this kind of work, but what I notice on urban farms here is that there are many more women, and they are doing much more work, while men act as helpers. There are no real male farmers on urban farms [in Vilnius]. Maybe Tomas is such a farmer, but again, he is more like an organizer [than a farmer]. (Darius, 35 yo, 9/27/2017)

This quotation shows the not so subtle ways in which gender inequalities become interwoven into farming work allocations and time commitments (cf. Bartkienė et al., 2019: 65–66). It is based on a circular logic in which women are expected to perform most of the "tedious" care work such as weeding because they are ostensibly better at it. But they are better at it only because they were socialized into these tasks and learned the skills by doing them throughout their lifetime. In her analysis of the salmon industry in Alaska, Hébert (2008) documents a similar misrecognition of socialized gender roles as biologically determined divisions of work. In Hébert's case, better paid fishing tasks were seen as men's work, while women's smaller hands and "natural" attention to detail were suited for working in less valued processing jobs. Similarly, less rewarding and physically more taxing agricultural work becomes a woman's destiny on the urban farm.

The unequal distribution of care work on the urban farms is not surprising: as feminist scholars writing on alternative food provisioning schemes have showed, gender is a good predictor of who is going to do most of the work (Deutsch, 2011; Laudan, 2001). What is more notable in the Lithuanian case is the intersection of gender and age structures that puts the burden on the older female farmers.

Taking a broad view of these issues, this section has considered the ecological and gendered dimensions of the diverging care temporalities. The communal values of urban farmers are embodied in a farm landscape where different plants are mixed together in contrast to the strictly ordered aesthetics of the former *sodai*. More importantly, the new aesthetics of farming reveals tensions stemming from different understandings of what constitutes care for the plants and who has to perform it. The younger generations of farmers approach farming as a human-centered activity: a communal enterprise and a form of self-realization and meditation, whereas the older generation follows a plant-centered approach that equates their responsibilities for the plants to caring for children, which in itself is a gendered role that falls more on women than men. What is most revealing about this constellation of relationships among farmers, plants, and nonhuman nature, however, is that despite generational differences in how farmers define care, older women are consistently expected to perform most of the care work. In other words, even the most forward-looking ideas of the current Lithuanian urban farming movement continue to reproduce longstanding gender and age inequalities.

7. Concluding Reflections

Our study of an urban farm in Vilnius shows how the historical context shapes local experiences of care for the land and plants. For the older generation of women who draw on their experiences of gardening under socialism and the early years of post-socialism, care for the plants is an activity imbued with individual responsibility. Describing their relationship to the plants in terms of kinship, they focus on maximizing the productivity of plants by attending to the needs of each plant. From a temporal perspective, the civic-minded younger generation considers caring for the farm as communal events. This new urban farmers approach urban farming both as a break from their fast-paced lives and a rupture with the historically-rooted understandings of hard agricultural labor performed with family members and repeated annually. For them, plants grown on urban farms are vehicles for addressing social and environmental problems while working with fellow community members (see also Bartkienė et al., 2019: 59). These two approaches to agricultural care are embodied in different ecologies: while orderly and weed-free landscapes were a norm during socialism and post-socialism, the new urban farming movement has embraced a "natural" landscape aesthetics where different plants are grown together. In this sense, our study highlights a paradox: the productivist approach to agricultural care work that the older generation of farmers practices and that

emphasizes order and neatness is more attuned to the natural world and its rhythms, whereas the new urban farming approach that creates a more "organic" landscape and aims to address broader environmental issues emerges as surprisingly anthropocentric.

To be sure, no generation is homogenous. Whether or not one takes the individualized and kinship-based care approach to urban farming or embraces community-building ideals depends on one's individual paths and experiences. For example, all farmers in their forties and fifties spent their formative years under socialism, but some engaged in the plant-centric choreography of care work while others focused on broader communal concerns. Yet to think about these groups as generations helps to highlight the temporality of the human experience without obfuscating identities and unique backgrounds of individual farmers.

Our study focuses only on a small group of farmers, but a close look at how members of this community approach and schedule their care for the farm shows that caring for the plants on urban farms are deeply shaped by contemporary work/leisure rhythms, along with historically specific definitions of care and nature. Our analysis also reveals that the Herculean task of synchronizing capitalist temporalities of urban life with biological cycles falls on the most economically and socially vulnerable group—older women living on fixed incomes. This in turn points to the importance of safety nets and the welfare state in enabling the kinds of environmental civics initiatives that urban farming embodies: without retirement benefits and generous maternity leave policies, most Lithuanian women would not have time to be volunteer farmers, undermining efforts to implement the ideals of the global urban farming movement in Lithuania.

The final version of this paper was prepared in the midst of the 2020 coronavirus epidemic, when stay-at-home orders and the attendant economic decline have challenged foundational assumptions about the efficacy of the modern agro-food system, particularly in the United States. As some of the largest US food processors are forced to shut down due to infections among their workers and commercial farms must resort to disposing of milk and culling animals, what just months ago was labeled as an "alternative," "niche," or "boutique" food economy is becoming a major player in local food systems. Consumers are rushing to establish direct supply lines to local farms; Community Supported Agriculture schemes are seeing record high enrollments; and sales of seeds and seedlings are at unprecedented levels, indicating an interest in and renewed commitment to individual and collective forms of gardening and farming, both inside and outside cities (e.g. Tatter and Chakrabarti, 2020).

In Lithuania and Eastern Europe more broadly, where supply chains are exceptionally short (Blumberg and Mincytė, 2019; Varga, 2017b) and the line separating commercial and alternative agricultural sectors is not as strongly drawn as it is in the United States and some Northern European countries, the agro-food system has been resilient and there have been no reports of interruptions in food supply systems. Yet the virus has challenged fundamental values and priorities, with a substantive effect in shaping the visions and possibilities of future prosperity and sustainability of self-provisioning agriculture. For older Lithuanians, this crisis is another affirmation of their subsistence-oriented lifestyles (Inytė, 2020). With April being the key month for planting gardens, officials in Lithuania are working around the clock to dissuade determined gardeners from taking congested public transportation to *sodai*. Consequently, most of our current communications with urban farmers, neighbors, and family members end with them lamenting the state of their seedlings, which crowd windowsills and balconies and are in dire need of being planted in greenhouses and outside—a clear reminder to us that the seasonal clock is ticking. In addition, the closing of national borders that is preventing migrant workers from traveling to fields in Spain, the Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom, everyone expects there will be many more mouths to feed from local resources. In this context, historically tested individual subsistence efforts that focus on producing as much food as possible and focusing on the needs of each plant are winning out over ideals of meditation and reflexivity.

At the same time, in Lithuania's public debates as elsewhere, there is also a growing recognition of interdependences and responsibilities that humans have toward other humans and nonhuman species alike. Despite strict, months-long social distancing policies that have kept Lithuanians isolated in their apartments, there has been an increasing recognition of and concern for collective well-being: for one person to be healthy, others around them must also be healthy. It is impossible to know what this new ethos of collective care will bring, but the fact that it has entered popular debates suggests the emergence of a different political theory of well-being. The urban farms are also thriving and even those farms that had been closed for several years are re-opening and attracting new volunteers. Significantly, this renewed interest in collective forms of urban farming has not arrived via Western media, as the global trends of tactical urbanism or community building that motivated younger urban farmers did. They are being generated locally, making them more authentic and legitimate for the Lithuanian context. This opens a possibility that urban farmers in Vilnius can articulate a homegrown vision of sustainable urban publics and communal spaces (see also Aistara, 2018; Kopczyńska, 2020; Varga, 2017a; Yotova, 2018).

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