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Searching for sustainable food provisioning: invisible places, ordinary practices and unusual suspects

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Wageningen University

sustainable food

geopolitics

Alternative Food Networks

knowledge production

bias

Czechia

the Netherlands

allotment gardens

urban agriculture

**There is a geography to every research
because all researchers come from somewhere**

**Where do you come from?/ Where are you local?
How does this shape your ideas about food and agriculture?**



**There is a geography to every research
because all researchers come from somewhere**

What is a normal way of producing and obtaining food?

What is an alternative?

What does a sustainable food system look like?






The search for sustainable food

SQS



Review

Sustainability in Alternative Food Networks: A Systematic Literature Review

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The search for sustainable food

Table 1. Countries targeted in empirical studies. Note: Our elaboration.

Targeted Countries	Frequency	Targeted Countries	Frequency	Targeted Countries	Frequency
USA	11	Finland	2	Germany	1
Czechia	7	Bolivia	1	India	1
UK	7	Brazil	1	Mexico	1
Italy	6	Bulgaria	1	Poland	1
Australia	4	Denmark	1	Romania	1
Canada	4	Ecuador	1	Vietnam	1
Spain	3	France	1		

“Taking as reference the socio-economic and political North-South divide, results show that there are only six indications of countries located in the Global South. That is, only 11% of studies in our sample focused specifically on countries located in the Global South.”

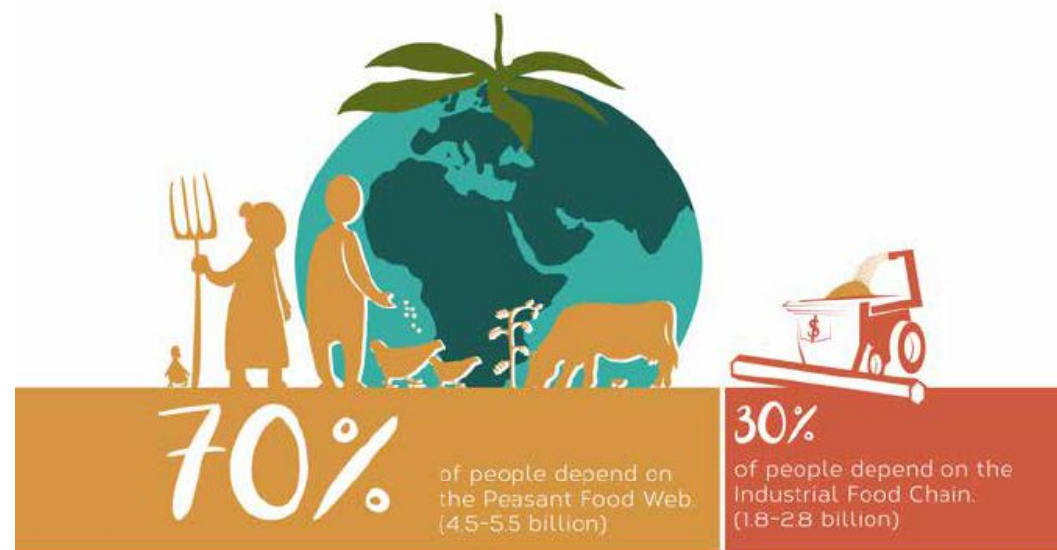
Michel-Villarreal et al. 2019

The search for sustainable food

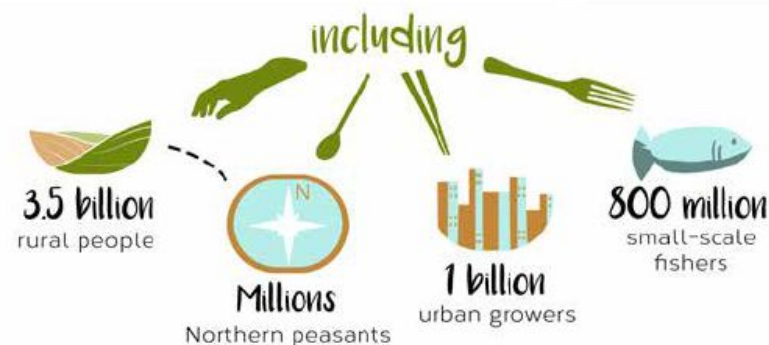
Table 3. Types of AFNs studied in empirical papers. Note: Our elaboration.

Types of AFNs studied	Frequency
Community Supported Agriculture	8
Farmers markets	7
Organic farms	6
Cooperatives	5
Solidarity Purchasing Groups (GAS)	5
Farm shops	4
Urban Agriculture	4
Box scheme	3
Community gardens	3
Organized Groups of Supply and Demand	2
Allotment	2
Direct sales	2
E-commerce	1
Fairtrade	1
Food self-provision	1
Pastured poultry	1
Slow food event	1
Vending machines	1
Wild food networks	1

The search for sustainable food



96% of all recorded food and agricultural research takes place in industrialized countries (ETC Group, 2009: 1).



3rd Edition, 2017

Urban food growing



Global North

urban / community gardening

hobby with possible activist aspects

ecological, social and educational benefits

little data on food production

innovative and trendy

urban lifestyle

Global South

urban agriculture, household food production

motivated by economic need

food security, income opportunities

other benefits neglected

traditional

rural lifestyle transferred to urban settings

“Rather than joining the North or the South, the East has fallen between the cracks. (...)

The demise of the Second World’s political project – communism – wiped the East off the global map, any distinctiveness of more than 70 years of communist rule erased.

The East is too rich to be a proper part of the South, but too poor to be a part of the North.“

Müller M (2018) In Search of the Global East: Thinking between North and South.

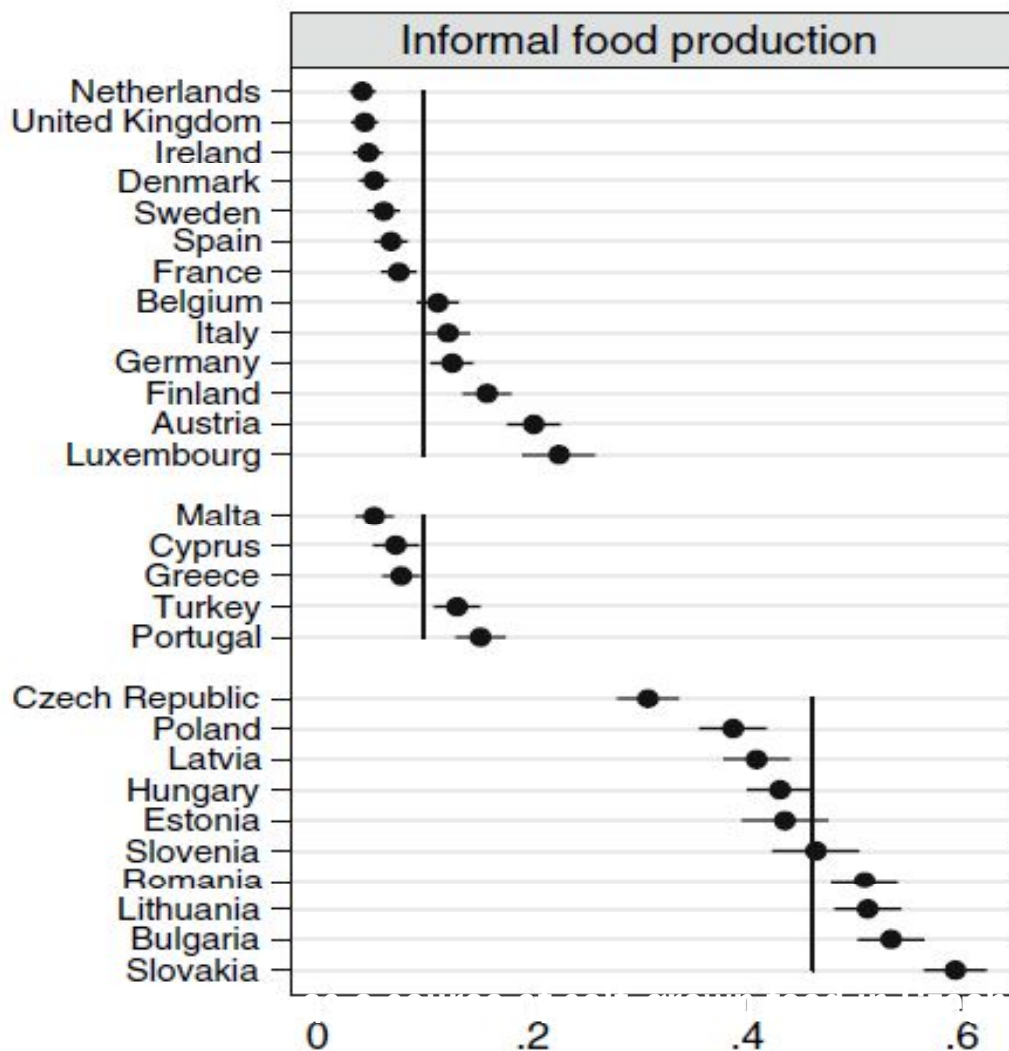
Geopolitics: 1–22.

DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2018.1477757.

“The predicament of the East marks a dual exclusion: from the entitled Global North and from the marginalised Global South. (...)

The East is different but similar, Other but not quite.“

Food self-provisioning in Central and Eastern Europe



Alber J and Kohler U (2008) Informal Food Production in the Enlarged European Union.

Social Indicators Research 89(1): 113–127.

DOI: 10.1007/s11205-007-9224-1.

“In these countries the market never became the predominant source of production or exchange to a similar degree as in western countries.

(...)

the citizens of these countries learned to cope with economic stress by relying on barter, informal assistance by family or friends, exchange in the shadow economy and also on the production of food.”

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY: ALLOTMENT GARDENING IN CZECHIA AND THE NETHERLANDS

Sovová, L., Veen, E. J., 2020: Neither Poor nor Cool:
Practising Food Self-Provisioning in Allotment Gardens
in the Netherlands and Czechia.

Sustainability, vol. 12, n. 12. DOI:10.3390/su12125134.



11 gardeners in Brno, Czechia
MSc thesis Lucie Sovová, 2015



11 gardeners in Utrecht, the Netherlands
MSc thesis Kylie Totté, 2017

COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY: ALLOTMENT GARDENING IN CZECHIA AND THE NETHERLANDS

What do people do and how do they understand their practices?

foodlogs
interviews

Table 1. An example of a food log, as presented to respondents.

Date	Food	Source	Amount	Usage
1/8	Potatoes	Supermarket	2 kg	Own consumption
8/8	Plums	Garden	200 g	Gift for neighbour
20/8	Zucchini	Gift from sister	1 kg	Pickled
30/8	Apples	Bought from a farmer	20 kg	Stored
...

STARTING ASSUMPTIONS AND POINTS OF COMPARISON

Dutch gardeners have more activist motivations

Czech gardeners are motivated economically

- motivations to grow food
- amount of produce
- use of agrochemicals
- conscious consumerism
- use of produce (sales and consumption vs sharing)

RESULTS

Despite minor differences, Dutch and Czech gardeners “do the same thing“

Having a fulfilling hobby and obtaining fresh food were the main motivations in both countries

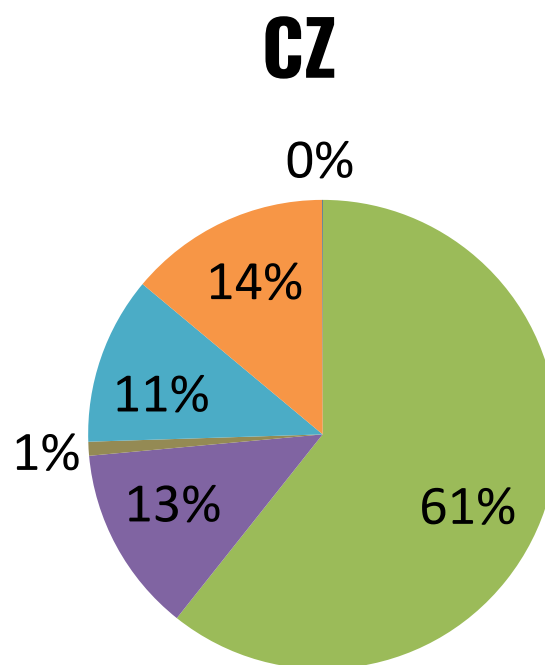
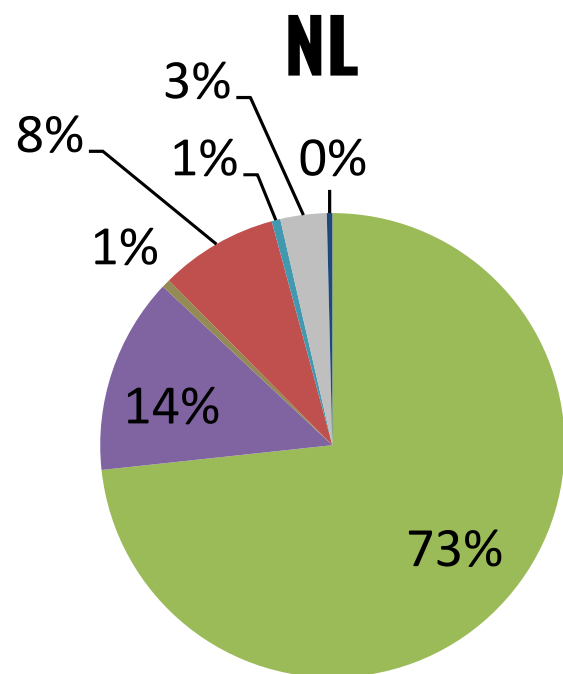
Gardeners' harvests were comparable

HARVESTS AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY RATES

Table 3. Respondents' harvests and self-sufficiency rates.

Dutch Gardeners			Czech Gardeners		
	Harvest (kg)	Self-sufficiency (%)		Harvest (kg)	Self-sufficiency (%)
NL1	52	88	CZ1	9	36
NL2	38	75	CZ2	162	26
NL3	58	73	CZ3	67	76
NL4	46	21	CZ4	50	51
NL5	28	90	CZ5	2	6
NL6	18	44	CZ6	137	68
NL7	16	69	CZ7	87	67
NL8	41	68	CZ8	26	100
NL9	51	77	CZ9	32	79
NL10	41	82	CZ10	16	21
NL11	85	86	CZ11	44	43
Average	41	70		57	52

SOURCES OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES



garden
supermarket
outdoor market
organic/farmer shop
neighbourhood shop
gift
foraging

* including preserved and shared food

MINOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GARDENERS

Dutch gardeners more diligent in organic growing methods (allotment rules)

Dutch gardeners more familiar with conscious consumerism, though only partly practicing it

Dutch gardeners sold more produce,
Czech gardeners shared more



Searching for sustainable food provisioning

Invisible places

Everyday practices

Unusual suspects



THANK YOU
for your attention

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PhD thesis: Grow, share of buy? Understanding the diverse food economies of urban gardeners: <https://edepot.wur.nl/519934>

Current work: Urbanising in Place: <http://urbanisinginplace.org/>